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THE HALF-SMART SET





THEIR RIVIERA JOURNEY

THE HALF-SMART SET

A NOVEL

WITH THREE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
By ARMAND BOTH

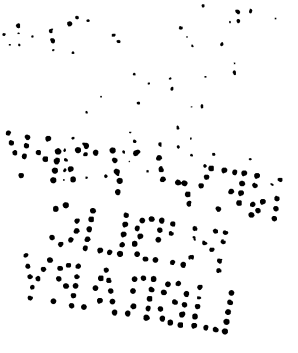


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CHAPTER I

"WELL, old Sobersides, and so you're going back to bury yourself?"

The man thus addressed was a magnificent specimen of the young Englishman of the prosperous middle class. Six feet three inches in height, broad in proportion, well-made with a fine head well set on well-developed shoulders, Christopher Thorne, black-haired, dark-eyed and florid of complexion, did credit to the Yorkshire stock he came of, and to the training of a public school, followed by three years at Oxford.

"Yes, I suppose that is what you would call it," he admitted, and though his tone was robust, there may have been an undertone of melancholy resignation perceptible to the quick ear of his old schoolfellow.

Louis Arlington, the schoolfellow in question, was a dapper little fellow of boyish figure, with small, handsome features, neat white hands, and an air of dandyism that suited his figure and proportions.

He and his brother Alfred, a young man of the same type as himself but on rather a larger scale, were the eldest sons of a City merchant well enough off to live in Queen's Gate, and it was in a sombrely handsome apartment of his house there that the two young men were receiving the farewell visit of Christopher Thorne, who, after taking his degree, had

been spending some months in Germany, preparatory to settling down in the office of his father, an attorney who was in practice in the Yorkshire town of Barnsfield, and who was reported to have made money.

The prospect, to a young man fresh from the freer life of the university and of his residence abroad, was not an inviting one. But Louis and Alfred Arlington, used to the luxurious life of the London middle class, had no idea how uninviting it was to the unfortunate Christopher. Grave of manner and serious of mind, Christopher had yet seen just too much of the world outside the narrow life of a typical provincial household to look with anything but dread upon the life he would have to lead between his father's office and his home.

He knew, indeed, that his family expected him to marry, had picked out a wife for him belonging to the same class as their own, prim, strict of conduct and modest of manner, coming of a family reputed to be well off, and in all respects suited to rule a household as like as possible to that ruled by his mother.

But the prospect had no charms for Christopher. He knew that he could not escape his fate, that his father had treated him well in sending him to Oxford and to Germany, and that it was incumbent upon him to do gracefully the thing that was expected of him, and to fall into the groove which had been made for him.

Nobody knew, however, what vague desires and aspirations he had to stifle, what undefined hopes of happiness he had to crush, when he bowed his head in

submission to the parental wishes, and did quietly the only thing there was to be done.

On this, the last day but one of his short stay in London on his way home from Germany, however, he felt that it was a relief, a sort of dissipation, to look in upon a schoolfellow who belonged to a different sort of set from that in which his own people moved, one indeed which the Thornes would unhesitatingly have decried as dissipated and "fast."

Christopher laughed mildly at the epithet applied to him.

"Yes," he assented again in his grave tones. "I suppose it is burying oneself."

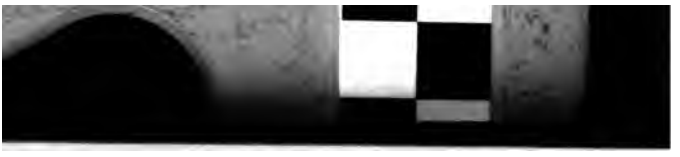
"By Jove!" said Alfred, who was reclining in a saddlebag chair, with his feet over one of the arms, and thoughtfully allowing the ash of his cigarette to fall on the carpet as he read the "Pink 'un." "I wouldn't be you, Thorne! Barnsfield after London, or Oxford or Schlingenschlangenbad or whatever the place was called where you went to forget your German—must be infernal!"

"It's—it's quiet," admitted Christopher after searching for an epithet.

"And slow!" said Louis with feeling. "I suppose you'll get away sometimes, won't you, for a run up to town? We can always put you up, you know, for a week-end, or as much longer as you can spare."

Christopher smiled rather ruefully.

"Thanks awfully. But I'm afraid it will be impossible. My father has been most awfully good to me,



has given me a great many advantages he didn't e himself, but he has odd notions about things, and is that when a man settles down he must do it good. He looks upon my playtime as over—he n had any himself—and I strongly suspect that suggestion that I should like occasionally to rel the monotony of Barnsfield in the way you sug would be looked upon very much as if I had prop to blow up the Tower of London, or wreck the Co tution of the British Empire."

"By Jove!" said Alfred from his corner, in a of intense, almost incredulous compassion.

"When do you go to that provincial paradis asked Louis with feeling, if without much tact.

"On Monday."

"So you've just got to-morrow to spare. What you going to do with to-morrow?"

"Go to the Abbey, I think, and take a last round."

"Lively programme!" said Louis mockingly. Look here. Never mind the Abbey. Come d with us to the Heronry, nicest people you ever m and a change from the sort you'll have to live am up there. They've got a houseboat and a ste launch, and we'll have no end of a jolly time."

Christopher shook his head.

"No, thanks," said he, "I don't think I should much at home in that set."

"What do you mean by 'that set'?" asked L rather aggressively.

Christopher perceived that he had been indiscreet, but he stuck to his guns.

"Well, the set that does nothing but enjoy itself."

"Oh, there you're wrong. Old Goldsmith, the father, is one of the hardest-worked men in England. Never takes a day off except the regulation Stock Exchange holidays four or five days in the year. His nose is always at the grindstone, and it's only his children who get much benefit from his labour. They have a rippin' time of it, certainly."

"Yes. Well, they're as different as possible from the set I belong to, the set where every one is expected to do something, to contribute his share of solid work to keep the establishment going. My sisters have each their own tasks, and they must not neglect them any more than I may neglect mine or my father and mother theirs."

Alfred, from his corner, regarded Christopher with a broad grin of pity and amusement.

"Poor beggars!" said he. "What a time you must have of it. I don't see what's the good of grinding when the money's made! Our father sees it as we do too. And so does old Goldsmith. If you've worked hard and got on, as they've done, and have so got work into the grain that you're too old to learn how to enjoy life, why, see that your children learn to enjoy it for you! That's the way we look at things in our set, and it suits me down to a T."

And Alfred took out another cigarette, lit it,

and settled himself down more comfortably to his paper.

Christopher was nettled by his tone of veiled contempt. Indeed it was scarcely veiled.

"Well," he said, "I really think, though of course you won't agree with me, that I'd sooner be as we are, all workers, than neither one thing nor the other. If one were born heir to an earldom, say, or were the son of a man with fifty thousand a year that came without being worked for, it would be pleasant enough to be in the swim of things, and to have motor-cars, and a yacht, and a house in town, a couple of places in the country, and to do the smart thing all round. But failing that, I think I'd just as soon be as I am, frankly a worker, not a drone, and feel that I had my place in the world to fill and that I could fill it. Be smart, or don't be smart, one or the other. I shouldn't care to belong to your half-smart set."

Alfred moved angrily in his chair, but Louis, the elder, had the sense to see that the remark, if severe, had been called forth by his brother's own rudeness. So Louis took it with a laugh, and said with good-humoured malice:—

"Well, you may turn up your nose at us, but we don't have half a bad time of it, though we may be only half-smart. And look here, now you've put our backs up, you shall just learn for yourself whether even half-smartness is a thing to be despised. I insist on your going down with us to-morrow to the Heronry, and seeing for yourself whether there isn't something

to be said for our capacity for enjoyment, at any rate. Now, look here. We're going to be down there to-morrow in time for luncheon, so I must find out how to dodge the inconvenience of these confounded Sunday trains. Where's a Bradshaw?"

He found an *A B C*, and turned over the leaves impatiently, slapping the book down at last with a frown.

"Nothing between 9.40 and 5.30! Confound it! Well, we must go by the 9.40 from Paddington, and loaf about for an hour or so, so as to put in an appearance about one. In time for luncheon."

"But I shouldn't like to. I'm a stranger to these people."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. Mrs. Goldsmith likes to see new faces, and, as for the old chap, if you don't tell him you've never been there before he won't know. We're all alike to him."

Christopher's curiosity was roused by this time, and he asked:—

"What are the young people like?"

"Well, there aren't many of them left at home now. The two eldest daughters are married; both of 'em rather—well, they might be startling to the Barnsfield notions of propriety. And then there's Pat. That's the youngest daughter, and the only one that's unmarried. She's only just eighteen. She's an awfully jolly girl, drives her own motor-car, and I've seen her drive four-in-hand, with a cigarette in her mouth, too!"

"Ugh!" involuntarily burst from the lips of Christopher.

The two young Arlingtons roared with laughter at his disgusted face.

"Yes, I daresay you think me very provincial, and very dull and stupid," said Christopher quietly. "But to me, such actions on the part of a young girl, supposed to be a lady, are frankly shocking."

The two Arlingtons laughed again.

"Oh, that's nothing to what her sisters, Lorna and Myra, do," cried Alfred. "If all they say is true, Lady Gane—that's Lorna—is a bit of a scorcher."

Christopher took up his hat.

"Well, I don't think I should care to make your half-and-half friends' acquaintance," he said, as he held out his hand to Louis.

But he had roused an obstinate spirit in both the young men, and they insisted that he should go with them to-morrow to the Heronry, which was on the Upper Thames, and, they said, one of the prettiest places on the river; and, seeing that they had overdone their story, they proceeded to take back all they had said, to declare that their legends were "all rot," and that he would find as humdrum a party of strictly correct young people there as ever he could in Barnsfield.

And in the end, between curiosity and incredulity, Christopher allowed himself to be persuaded, and it was arranged that on the following morning he should meet them at Paddington at half-past nine.

The Arlingtons were careful to say nothing more about the Goldsmiths which was calculated to shock their provincial friend, having put their heads together and decided that it would be better fun to "see how he took it," if they were to plunge him into the merry society of the Heronry and the Goldsmiths' married daughters and their friends without too much preparation.

So that when, after a pleasant journey on a lovely June morning, they sauntered through the fields on alighting from the train, and came up to the door of the Heronry at a few minutes before one o'clock, Christopher Thorne had had time to forget the terrible warnings he had received on the previous day; and indeed his first view of the house took him by surprise.

He had been prepared, by the talk of the Arlingtons, for a great, pretentious, gaudy house, brand-new, possibly stuccoed, and glaring with geraniums and bright-hued flowers. He had vaguely pictured a broad carriage drive with a gate at each end, and a large, imposing house with footmen in gorgeous liveries in the hall.

But instead of this, the three young men came, as they walked along a quiet road with trees on the one side and a high wall on the other, to a door in the wall, painted dark green, with a hanging iron bell-pull by the side of it.

"This is the Heronry," said Louis.

And before Christopher had recovered from his surprise, the door in the wall was opened by a man-

servant out of livery, who conducted them through an immense conservatory filled with beautiful flowers and ferns and palms, into a very large hall, one side of which contained a full-sized billiard-table, while on the other there was a fireplace, now filled with plants, and a very picturesque shallow staircase with old panelling, probably taken from some ancient house, along the sides.

They crossed the hall, and were shown into a charming drawing-room, in which no single object attracted Christopher's attention particularly, but which gave him strongly the sense of being the most luxurious and withal harmonious room he had ever entered.

Withal, nothing in it struck with a sense of newness. Everything seemed to have had time to grow into its proper place in the natural order of things, and about every corner and every nook in it there was a subtile, all-pervading suggestion of a woman's taste of the most perfect kind.

There was nobody in the room, however, and the servant said:—

"I think they must all be in the garden, sir. This way."

And going by way of the open French window, he led them out into a garden, well grown with trees, not very large, but which gave Christopher another indefinable sensation, that of cosiness.

In front of the window by which they went out there was a sort of screen of shrubs, and from behind

it came the pleasant sound of the talk and laughter of young people.

Emerging from behind the shrubs, the servant led the way to the lawn, and standing aside, said to Louis:—

"Mrs. Goldsmith is behind the willow, sir."

It was all so informal, so quiet, that Christopher found himself the next moment shaking hands with a gentle-faced, grey-haired lady in silver-coloured silk and white lace, before he quite realised that he was not only in the presence of, but actually surrounded on all sides by, members of the half-smart set of which he had spoken so contemptuously.

It was some moments before he recovered from the sort of bewilderment into which the introduction threw him. In the meantime he was only half-conscious that he was talking the usual nonsense to Mrs. Goldsmith and to her husband, who was absolutely like almost every other prosperous middle-aged City man that Christopher had ever met.

From his slightly bald head, his well-trimmed small beard and grey moustache, his rotund figure and plump hands, to his easy grey suit and Homburg straw hat, there was no salient feature about him whatever. He liked the noise and the fun, the chatter and the laughter, of the young people about him. But beyond the money article in the morning paper and a fixed idea that the Radicals were sending the country to the devil, he had no opinions or interests worth mentioning.

When he had time to take stock of his surround-



ings, Christopher found that he was being introduced to two ladies whom he rightly supposed to be the two married daughters.

The first of these, and the eldest, was Lady Gane, a short, broad-shouldered yet smart-looking woman, very well dressed in écru-coloured lace and pansy velvet, with a big shady hat and a pansy-coloured sunshade. She had dyed hair of a golden shade, scarlet lips, dreamy brown eyes, and an artificial yet rather attractive manner.

The second lady, Mrs. Aylwin, was an exceedingly ugly little woman, thin, nasal of voice, with large grey eyes. Her hair was dark and was worn short, and her face was thickly covered with white powder. She was smartly, but not distinctively dressed in very pale green, and had on more diamonds than Christopher had ever seen on a woman by daylight.

Both these ladies were surrounded by young men, most of them in flannels, and altogether Christopher counted more than a dozen young members of his own sex, and some five or six ladies.

But it was round the two young married ladies that the wheels of the circle revolved, and all he noticed concerning the other ladies was that they were younger and that one of them was exceedingly handsome.

The family were so well used to entertaining, that every one seemed, without any effort, to find some one to talk to; and when Mrs. Goldsmith had turned to speak to some one else, the beautiful girl whom Christopher had noticed came up to him and saying simply:

"Would you like to see the golden pheasants?" led the way along a gravel path over which the trees formed an arch, until they reached a large aviary, where the birds were stalking up and down in the sunshine.

"Do you like birds," she asked, "and animals? I can show you the white rabbits, if you care for animals."

"I should like to see them very much," said Christopher, who was dazzled by this girl, with her simplicity, her straightforward, simple manners, and a certain dignified courtesy which seemed to show that she had been used to play the hostess since her babyhood.

She could not, he thought, be more than sixteen years of age, although she was so tall and well-developed of figure; for she wore her hair, which was of a beautiful golden-brown colour, tied with a simple broad bow of black ribbon at the nape of her neck, and her face, which was round and creamy of complexion and placid of expression, was that of a great, big, soft-skinned, innocent baby.

Her big soft blue eyes were those of a baby, too, he thought, and the words that came from her lips, sweet as they sounded, were childish and simple and almost infantile.

"Just look at this one. Isn't he a dear?" she said, as she pulled a big white rabbit out of its hutch and offered him to Christopher to caress. "Isn't he soft, and fluffy and too dear for anything? I love my old bunny, don't I, dear?"

And she held him up against her round young cheek, and petted the animal and talked to him, all in such a simple and pretty way that Christopher was charmed, and looked upon the young creature with a sort of rapturous delight, as the sweetest thing in budding womanhood he had ever seen.

It was not until the luncheon gong had rung, and the pretty girl had put back the rabbit into his hutch and shut him in, and led the way back to the group on the lawn, now all broken up and moving towards the house, that a question addressed by Mrs. Goldsmith to the lovely girl revealed to him her identity with the dreadful young person concerning whose shocking doings he had been warned.

The question was:—

"Why do you go about without your hat, Pat?"

CHAPTER II

IT was late in the afternoon; the party had been spending their time on the water, some in the launch, some in the skiffs and punts which belonged to the Heronry, and which were all moored to the banks of the little backwater near which the house, well screened from that side also, stood.

They were coming back now in twos and threes, and, landing among the trees near the house, were chatting about the events of the day.

A broad-shouldered, handsome, fair man of about five and twenty came up, laughing, to Pat, who had been lying in a punt all the afternoon, crumpling up her white lawn dress and baby muslin hat, and enjoying life in her own way, scarcely speaking at all except to utter commonplaces worthy of a child of seven.

"I say, Pat, this fellow the Arlingtons have brought is gone on you and no mistake."

Pat laughed sweetly.

"Is he?" she said. "I'm rather glad. I like him."

"Really? Well, it's as well you do. For nobody else could. I suppose he's an ordinarily intelligent man at other times, but to-day he is—forgive my saying so since you're so fond of him—a moonstruck idiot."



Pat frowned.

"I won't have you say that. He's too perfectly sweet for anything. I like dark men," replied Pat with charming candour, as she threw a glance of accentuated distaste at the golden moustache and blue eyes of the speaker.

Giles Wendover, who had flattered himself he was one of her special favourites, laughed shortly. He was a Government clerk, not overburdened with money, but with expectations. Pat liked him, and had even been heard to say that she would not mind marrying him, but Giles was a cautious young man, though he affected a careless air and a happy-go-lucky temperament.

He knew what sort of wives the Goldsmith girls made, and he was shy of taking upon himself such a responsibility as was involved in the possession of one of them. Nevertheless, he felt a righteous anger at the idea that Pat should be ready to marry any one else, when he had honoured her by unmistakable marks of his preference and approval.

"Well, if you marry him you'll have to go and settle in a country town in Yorkshire," retorted Giles viciously.

Pat laughed in her turn.

"Shall I?" she said. "I don't think so. I always do what I like, and I shouldn't like that at all."

She spoke quite simply, and as if the suggested marriage were a possible, nay even a probable thing.

Giles was nettled.

"You don't really mean that you've fallen in love

with the fellow, do you, Pat?" he asked with a sentimental note in his voice.

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know. Who talks about falling in love? I'm sure I didn't begin it."

And with an air of weariness, as if the subject were one of the most trifling kind, too frivolous and empty for discussion, pretty Patricia shrugged her shoulders and sauntered towards the house, declaring that she was starving and that she would give the world for a cup of tea.

It was Christopher who brought it to her, as she lounged, a charming mass of crumpled lawn, out of which peeped two well-shaped feet in silk stockings and high-heeled French shoes, in a deep chair on the lawn.

"How good of you, Mr. Thorne! You'd make me lazy if you were here always. I generally have to go and fetch my tea myself," said Pat, with the first touch of coquetry he had seen in her.

"I wish I were here always," he replied in a choked voice, feeling like a bashful schoolboy.

Pat answered with a smile that dimpled her pretty face in the most delightful way.

"Well, I think I'm glad you're not here always, because you'd get tired of me and then you wouldn't be so nice," she said in her slow, languid tones, that Christopher thought a revelation of the charm of woman.

He had never seen a girl like this, so bold in her simplicity, so straightforward, so childlike, and yet so

dignified, so sure of herself. The slow movements, the languid utterance, the amiable manners of this spoilt child were all so many new charms, and he felt, as he looked at her and talked to her, as if he had never before recognised what was meant by the fascination of woman.

"I shall be going away to Yorkshire to-morrow," said he in a voice which he scarcely recognised as his own, "so I'm afraid I shall never have an opportunty of seeing you again."

Pat sat up, and he thought the look of frank concern on her face was the most delicious thing he had ever seen.

"Going away—to Yorkshire to-morrow!" echoed she in a sort of open dismay. "Oh, but you mustn't. You must put it off."

He laughed. Never before had he allowed himself to be dictated to by a girl; and it flashed through his mind that if his father could have realised the abject manner in which he had gone down on his knees, as it were, before this eighteen-year-old spoilt child, he would have disowned him on the spot.

For the moment the command passed Pat's lips he had determined to obey her. At whatever cost he must see her again. Perhaps, he thought—for at this moment of his realising his weakness he was singularly conscious of an increased power of rapid thought—a few more meetings with her would dispel this charm which she now exercised over him; perhaps the very next time he saw her she would reveal some

other side of herself, some weakness or some defect which would suffice to cure him of his infatuation; for an infatuation is undoubtedly was.

"Do you think that it is so easy to put off one's duties then?" he asked, with a sort of indulgent smile down into the girl's lovely face.

"Duty! Oh, if it's such an important duty to go away, I suppose you must go," said Pat, not attempting to hide the fact that she was displeased.

It seemed to him a wonderful thing that this spoilt child should look upon her lightly expressed wish as a command which ought to influence, as a matter of course, a man she now met for the first time.

But, on the other hand, he felt that this childish imperiousness, this taking for granted that he was at her orders, was an additional charm.

"If—if I were to stay in town for a day or two longer," he asked in hesitating tones, "might I come and see you again?"

The answer came promptly, frankly, without the least shyness or hesitation. From first to last, indeed, the shyness, the hesitancy, the doubts and fears, were all on his side.

"Oh, of course you may—indeed you must," said Pat. "I've taken a fancy to you."

Christopher heard this plain avowal with mixed feelings. If he had been told beforehand that a girl would say words like these to him, he would have said that he looked upon them as unwomanly and forward. But now that he heard them from the lips of Pat

Goldsmith, he felt that they were just the most fascinating bit of encouragement a man in love had ever received.

"Indeed!" said he, laughing a little, very shyly, unable entirely to hide the pleasure he felt.

Pat smiled in that curious, slow way she had, as if the thought which pleased her were a long time in forming.

"Oh, you mustn't think too much of anything I say. I've been spoilt, you know. I say just what comes into my head, and nobody minds, because I'm looked upon as not grown up yet, and not responsible."

"I think it's very clever of you to keep like that: old enough to know how to get your own way in everything, and yet young enough to turn round upon people and say that you're not responsible."

She peered up into his face and nodded slowly.

"Well," she said, "I think you're right. I have an idea that I'm a great deal cleverer than people think. Myra and Lorna are always looked upon as the clever ones of the family, but if cleverness consists in getting what you want, I think it remains to be seen whether I'm so far behind them after all."

"What is it that you particularly want in life?" asked Christopher, not knowing whether he was most gratified by her frankness or appalled by the undisguised selfishness of this simply expressed creed.

She pursed up her red mouth thoughtfully.

"Ah, that's a large order," she said. "I want a

good many things, and I don't think I could confess them all right off."

"No, no, of course not. I'm a stranger to you, and I have no right to your confidence."

Pat smiled delightfully.

"Ah!" she said, "I wasn't thinking of that. I think the truth was I didn't feel prepared to make out a long list of my wants offhand, so I took refuge in a put-off."

"I suppose you want to be rich all your life, for one thing?" hazarded Christopher.

"Well, I suppose I've always taken that for granted," assented the girl. "I must tell you though, that I'd have married a man who wasn't rich—I was quite ready to a little while ago—only it was he who said it would be uncomfortable for me. I suppose, though, all the time he meant that it would be uncomfortable for *him!*"

Christopher was amazed.

"And you—you were ready to marry him!" stammered he.

She nodded slowly.

"Yes," she said.

"I can't understand it!" said Christopher.

"Can't understand what?"

"Can't understand how any man whom you were ready to marry wasn't only too ready to marry you."

Pat smiled, evidently mildly pleased with the compliment.

"There was one thing against it," she said. "It

was the sort of marriage everybody had been expecting me to make. Now what I should like would be to surprise everybody. My sisters' marriage were too beastly for anything. And the weddings! Oh, they were quite too awfully horrid! Everybody drank too much champagne; and the crowd, and the fuss, and the silly presents! I should hate to be married like that myself. But of course my sisters were different."

"Yes, I should think so," assented Christopher, upon whom both Lady Gane and Mrs. Aylwin had made a very disagreeable impression. "Are their husbands here to-day?" he went on.

"My eldest sister, Lady Gane, is a widow," said Pat. "John Aylwin's alive, of course. That's Myra's husband. But he only goes to the houses where she doesn't go, or, when he comes here, it's when she goes somewhere else. He's somewhere else to-day, with some of the Gaiety people on a house-boat, I think."

Christopher's face flushed.

"I shouldn't like you to make such a marriage as that," he said.

Pat laughed.

"No, indeed. And he's so ugly! At least I think him ugly. And he thinks so much about eating and drinking. But then he makes a great deal of money —he's a solicitor and he works very hard—and Myra has plenty to spend. Of course that's nice, but I should want something more. I think," said Pat with

a judicial air, "it would be much nicer to have a husband one needn't mind being seen about with, to start, at any rate. Then if you got tired of one another afterwards, why it would be time enough for each to go his own way, wouldn't it?"

Christopher felt chilled.

"I don't like to hear a young girl like you talking like that," he said. "It's too cold-blooded. Why shouldn't you hope and expect to marry a man who would be as fond of you as you deserve, and of whom you would be fond—always be fond, I mean."

Pat looked solemn.

"Always! That's such a long time!" she said. "Now my likings are usually very transient, I must tell you that. First I like one person—for a little while, and then another—also for a little while. But to go on—— Oh, I really don't think I could manage it!"

"Under very exceptional circumstances you might, I suppose?" suggested he.

And he looked down into her face with an expression in his own dark eyes which was an avowal. For he was in love, head over ears in love, and he felt that the one thing in life to be hoped for, to be striven for, was to make this spoilt, wayward creature—whom he did not even know whether he trusted—his wife.

And Pat, with the same straightforwardness which had charmed him from the first, flirted with him in the way he would have her flirt, with frank talk like

this, not always pleasing or wholesome, and never conventional, but open, honest, if somewhat cynical, somewhat cold.

And when he went to town that night the Arlingtons did not dare to chaff him, for they knew that he was indeed hard hit.

A month later, Louis and his brother Alfred were sitting together in the smoking-room of their father's house when Christopher Thorne was announced, and they started up with exclamations of surprise.

The young Yorkshireman was so changed in appearance, however, that they would scarcely have known him. He looked pale, haggard and so deeply distressed that they hastened to ask him what was the matter.

"Nothing! Oh, nothing," he answered. And trying to recover his usual manner and voice, he said: "You didn't expect to see me again so soon, did you? I suppose you thought I was back in Yorkshire?"

"Well, no, the truth is we had heard you were still in town," admitted Louis. "And we came to the conclusion, if it isn't indiscreet to say so, that you couldn't tear yourself away."

Suddenly the face of their visitor changed. He began to tremble, and nodding, said:—

"Yes, that's the truth. And—and I've come to ask you something. Look here. It was you who first took me down there—to her people's place, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"You knew, I suppose, what would happen? You guessed that I—I——"

"Well, I knew you'd think it a nice place and Pat"—Christopher seemed to frown and become uneasy at the name—"a handsome girl. But we didn't expect you to go down like a ninepin, as you appeared to do. Never saw such a case, never!"

Christopher nodded.

"I want you to answer a question. That girl, Patricia Goldsmith, did have upon me the effect you describe. I fell in love with her. I'm madly in love with her now. I can't get over it; I shall never get over it. But——" his voice changed, his face grew dark, and he seemed to draw his breath painfully, "I've heard something to-day, something about her—and it makes me mad, crazy. Tell me—you know them all, all the family, and you've lived near them, and seen a lot of them always. There's no truth in the gossip I've heard about her, is there? You would tell me if you knew, and you would know, wouldn't you?"

The meaning under his words was plain enough, and the agony of the man was piteous to see.

Louis hastened to reassure him.

"There's no harm in the girl, not a bit," he said quickly. "I shouldn't like to say the same of the sisters, but I can of her. She's just a self-willed spoilt child who thinks the world is made for her, but that's all, that's all."

Christopher was standing up, with his back to Louis, pretending to look at a picture on the wall. But he

put up a shaking hand and furtively passed his
kerchief round his neck. Then he turned and sl
a grey face with dark lines in it.

"Thank God! Thank God!" he whispered ho
"I—I married her—at a registry office—this
ing!"

CHAPTER III

"BY Jove!"

Both the brothers said this together, and then there was a dead silence.

"Well," said Christopher sharply, when nobody had said anything for quite a long time, "you're surprised, I suppose!"

"Not exactly surprised," said Alfred. "I'm never surprised at anything the Goldsmith girls do."

It was a somewhat tactless comment, and the bridegroom looked uneasy.

Louis frowned at his brother, and unfortunately Christopher saw the frown.

"I hope you'll be happy," Louis said quickly. "And I don't see why you shouldn't. She's a charming girl, and ever so much nicer than her sisters."

"I should hope so," said Christopher fervently. "I can't bear either Lady Gane or Mrs. Aylwin."

"Oh, come," said Alfred, "that's rather sweeping. They're charming women, both of them, and so's Pat—Patricia—charming—Mrs. Thorne, I mean. I'm sure you'll be very happy."

Then conversation flagged again.

"I don't quite understand how it's all come about," said Louis presently. "I thought you had to go back to Yorkshire, and all that. Haven't you been back at all? Or have you been back and returned?"

"I haven't been back at all," said Christopher, who had the air of a man recovering from the effects of a bad attack of nightmare. "I—I was hard hit, as you know, from the first, and I made up my mind that nothing would content me but to marry her. And I thought the only possible means to that end was to follow up the slight impression I hoped I had made, and so I stayed here."

"And told your father?" suggested Louis rather diffidently.

"Well, no. I had the one thing before me, and that was enough. I've got to tell him now. However, that will be soon done. I shall go up to Yorkshire in a day or two."

"With—er—Mrs. Thorne?"

Christopher hesitated.

"I think not," he said.

"Do her people know?" asked Alfred.

"Yes. Patricia wanted to be married quietly, without any one knowing. She's half a child still, and revelled in the thought that she would spring her marriage upon them all as a surprise. And I was to go back to Barnsfield, to make arrangements with my father for establishing myself in London. That's her idea, and then to come and fetch her."

Consternation and dismay were almost openly exhibited on the faces of the two Arlingtons. They remained silent, however, and Christopher went on:—

"But of course I couldn't marry her without her

people's consent, so I told Mrs. Goldsmith and she agreed to say nothing about her knowledge to Patricia. But she told her husband, and he said he had no objection to the marriage, and that, as for our idea of being married quietly, he thought it was better than to have the fuss there was over the wedding of his two elder daughters."

"By Jove! There was a fuss, too! They were grand affairs, and we had a high old time—especially at Myra's—Mrs. Aylwin's," said Alfred.

"And so we were married this morning, and when we got outside the registry office we found Mrs. Goldsmith waiting in a cab, crying, of course. Patricia was furious, and got in and drove away in a rage with me for betraying her, as she called it."

The two Arlingtons could not help laughing.

"It's about the funniest marriage I ever heard about!" said Alfred.

Christopher frowned. Naturally, he did not like the epithet.

"Funny! There was nothing particularly humorous about it as far as I can see," he said. "Allowance has to be made for the fact that my wife is very young, and that she was not unnaturally disgusted at what took place at the weddings of her sisters. I should be very sorry to see her begin as they did. And I think it's a very good sign that she wished to start differently."

"Oh, yes, so do I, so do we," said Louis hastily. "Not that I have anything to say against the two

others—charming women both of them. But the elder Goldsmith girls were certainly not the sort of women who would have settled down quietly to domestic life.

"I wonder if Pat—Patricia will!" said Alfred rashly.

Christopher stood up, and tried to look as if he had not heard these words.

"Well, I won't bother you any longer; I must be going," he said. And trying to gloss over the real reason of his visit, he added quickly: "I thought you'd like to be the first to hear the news, as you are such old friends of the Goldsmiths."

"Thanks awfully. Never was so much interested in anything in my life," said Louis, as he shook hands and went with his visitor to the door. "And you'll let us know what you're going to do. We shall be tremendously interested over every development."

Christopher tried to laugh naturally.

"Oh, there'll be nothing startling," he said. "I have to go up north, to tell my father, and to persuade him to let me make different arrangements. Unless, of course, Patricia should decide to try life up there."

"Don't expect she'll do that," said Alfred quickly.

Again Christopher affected not to hear, and went out hurriedly, leaving the two brothers to stare at each other in consternation which was now open and unchecked.

"Well, of all the marvels!" began Alfred.

"Hush!" said Louis. "It's serious, you know.

Why on earth did they all arrange to have it done so quietly? I can't make it out. Pat, too, a girl who likes to have the best of everything! I should have thought she would be the first to stand out for the white satin and orange-blossoms, and all that sort of thing."

Alfred made a grimace.

"I wouldn't be in poor Thorne's shoes for something!" he said. "If he leaves her there at the Heronry she'll never go away from it—with him at any rate."

"Well, it's his own fault. He knew exactly what sort of people they were. He walked into it with his eyes open. And if a country solicitor with no money of his own and entirely at the mercy of a rather dry and despotic sort of father chooses to contract a hasty marriage with a spoilt girl belonging to a set like that of the Heronry, whose fault is it but his own if they don't get on?"

But Louis, though he thus affected to wash his hands of the whole affair, was deeply affected by it. The thought that he had been instrumental in bringing about a rash marriage between his old schoolfellow and chum Thorne, and such a wholly unsuitable girl as pretty, self-willed, spoilt Patricia Goldsmith, worried him greatly, and his brother's comments made the matter worse.

"It's odd the Goldsmiths should consent to its being so quiet, very odd," he said.

At last Louis shut him up rather roughly.

"Not odd at all," he said quickly. "Their other two girls, who were married with a flourish, haven't done so very well except from the money point of view, have they?"

"You mean they've succeeded in getting themselves talked about?"

"Yes. And so the old people may well have said to themselves, when this spoilt girl took it into her head that she would like to make a romantic marriage, that they might as well humour her. At any rate Thorne, they know, is a decent chap, and that's more than could be said of either Aylwin or gouty old Gane."

Alfred nodded assent, but without conviction.

"That's right," he said. "Make the best of it, Louis, but bad is the best."

Meanwhile poor Christopher, torn with a thousand painful emotions, was making his way towards his lodgings with a heavy heart.

That very afternoon, with his heart still sore at his bride's angry parting with him, he had met another of the Heronry *habitués* and had been forced to hear something said in a very slighting tone of the girl he had married. Quite aware that he had committed the rashest of rash acts, Christopher yet refused to believe that there was real cause for the gossip thus repeated about the girl he had married. He had silenced the speaker sharply, but without revealing his own position, and then, agitated beyond the point of endurance, he had gone straight to the Arlingtons, old friends of his own as well as of the Goldsmiths, and had unbosomed

himself to them of his secret, with dubious and unsatisfactory results.

It had been arranged between Patricia and himself before that morning that the bride should, after the ceremony, go straight back to the Heronry, and that Christopher should await her permission to come and declare himself to her parents, which, she said, he should do in a day or two.

In the meantime, however, as he had preferred to be honest with the Goldsmiths, and to inform them of the intended marriage, Patricia was in a high state of indignation, and the last look she had thrown at her newly-married husband, out of the window of the fly in which she drove off with her mother, was one which haunted him, which showed him, moreover, a side of her character which he had not yet seen and which gave him grave reason for fear.

Not even at that moment, however, assailed as he was by every sort of cruel doubt and fear that could torment a young husband, did Christopher Thorne for a moment regret what he had done.

He was young, but he was a man of real grit, and having given himself up wholly and unreservedly to the passion which possessed him, and made marriage with this girl the first object of his life, he stood fast by his colours, and maintained in his heart of hearts the belief that he had done well.

What were the comments of a dozen ill-natured tongues? What were the cynical doubts and beliefs of a handful of the irresponsibles of whom the Heronry

set consisted, compared to the conviction he felt, the absolute knowledge he believed himself to possess, that Patricia was pure and innocent, and that the daring exploits he himself deprecated, the self-will she openly exhibited, the caprice she took no pains to hide, were all part of a character unconventional indeed, childish indeed, but as free from all real evil as if she had been a baby?

So keen, however, was the pain he felt at the occurrences of the day, his wife's anger, the cruel gossip he had casually heard, the sort of consternation which the news of his marriage had produced in the Arlingtons, that he felt he could not rest until he had seen Patricia once more, until he had received her forgiveness, explained away what she chose to think his betrayal, and made peace with his darling.

It was nearly six o'clock when he left Queen's Gate. Stopping short when he had walked a few hundred yards, he hailed a hansom, and having suddenly made up his mind to go down to the Heronry that night, told the driver to go to Paddington as fast as he could.

Here he found there was a train at 6.30, which he was able to catch easily; and after a journey which seemed interminable to his impatience he found himself at the nearest station to the Heronry at a little after 8.17, the advertised time.

Walking was too slow for him, so he hailed a fly and drove at its best speed to the Goldsmiths' house, where the butler admitted him with the information that they had just finished dinner.

It was Saturday night, and Christopher knew that there would be, as usual, a large gathering of the family and old *habitués,* for the week-end.

It was the very evening, therefore, that he would not have chosen if he could have helped it.

But he had no choice. He felt strongly that he must not let a night pass over his head and that of his bride without their coming to some explanation. And he thought, as he walked through the luxurious conservatory, with its inviting lounges and dim lights, and into the handsome hall with its window-seats, and its shallow stairs, inviting to *tête-à-têtes,* that this was not the place in which he could, with an easy mind, leave his darling, while the house swarmed, as it always did on week-ends in July and August, with young men whose one aim in life was to enjoy themselves, without a thought who might be the sufferers for their pleasure.

There was one man in the hall, playing billiards with Mrs. Aylwin, who was wearing more diamonds than ever, and looking, Christopher thought, uglier than ever in cream satin and lace, with a great cascade of crimson roses down one side of her dress, and her face so whitened that it reminded him of the mask of the traditional pierrot.

She held out a little skinny hand loaded with diamond rings to Christopher with the air she always had of being an empress the touch of whose hand was an honour.

Christopher, who hated her for a personality which

repelled him, and feared her for her influence with Patricia, shook hands indeed, but with a certain coolness which the lady was not slow to mark and resent.

Apparently Mrs. Aylwin had not yet been taken into her sister's confidence, for she only said:—

"Oh, Mr. Thorne, we didn't know you were coming! Dinner's just over. Mamma is in the drawing-room, I think."

"Thank you," said he. "I'm afraid it is rather an unconventional time to turn up—in the country."

And he passed into the drawing room, where Mrs. Goldsmith and her husband were conversing together in a corner, and Lady Gane, surrounded by three or four young men, as usual, was singing at the piano. Christopher hated her songs, and her way of singing them. They were always French songs, sung with a perfect accent, and with all the meaning which a Parisian singer at a *café chantant* would have put into them. Although he was but a poor French scholar indeed, he understood always more than he cared to do of what she sang.

Patricia was not in the room.

Mr. and Mrs. Goldsmith started apart so guiltily when he came in that Christopher was sure they had been talking about him. It was with a heightened colour and quickened breath that he crossed the room and shook hands with them.

Mr. Goldsmith, who knew all about the quiet marriage, not from either bride or bridegroom, but from

his wife, beckoned the young man to a chair by his side.

"I know all about it," he said with a nod. "And if Patricia prefers a wedding like that, I had, as I suppose my wife told you, no objection. But I should like to hear what your plans are. Do I understand that you mean to live in London, or what?"

"I have to settle that with my father," said Christopher.

"You are entirely dependent upon him?"

"Almost. Not quite. I have certain expectations, that is to say, from my mother. But it has been my father's wish that I should take up his business at Barnsfield, and that is what I should propose to do myself, in the first place, if Patricia has no objection."

"You don't seem to have settled much!" remarked Mr. Goldsmith. "Young people generally make their plans first and marry afterwards. You seem to have reversed the process."

Christopher smiled faintly.

"The fact is," said he, "that marriage with your daughter seemed so much the most important and ardently to be desired thing in life to me that I wanted to make sure of that before I moved in any other direction. With Patricia, I'm ready to do anything, to go anywhere. Without her, it had begun to seem to me that I didn't care to do anything whatever."

Mr. Goldsmith smiled approvingly.

"She's a self-willed monkey," said he, "and it seems

she took very ill your telling her mother what you were going to do."

"Well, what could I do? Patricia had set her heart upon what she called a 'romantic' marriage, and upon springing it as a surprise upon everybody; while I couldn't, of course, do such a dishonourable thing as marry her without your consent."

"She's furious," said Mrs. Goldsmith, rising and speaking close in his ear. "I suppose you've come down to-night to make it up?"

Christopher admitted the fact.

"I had arranged to go up to Yorkshire on Monday," said he, "and to come down here to see her, as if nothing had happened, to-morrow. But I felt it was impossible, after her anger this morning, to let a night pass without seeing her and trying to bring her to reason. Where is she now?"

Mrs. Goldsmith looked round.

"Where is she? Oh, I don't know. Let me see. Young Wendover was talking to her. They went into the garden, I think."

"Thanks. I'll try and find her," said Christopher, with a lump in his throat.

Young Wendover was the last person he would have chosen to find his bride with on this the first evening of their marriage. Of all the selfish young fellows who ever made their own happiness their first and only consideration, in defiance of all rules of decency and common honour, young Wendover was the very image and type.

It was with an uneasy heart that Christopher went out into the grounds, where, in the faint moonlight, and by the additional illumination afforded by the Japanese lanterns which were hung here and there among the trees, he sought his bride.

First he came upon another couple, sitting in lounge chairs under the willow near the house. It was not until he had reached the farthest end of the garden that, on the path that skirted the backwater, well screened on each side by trees, he found Giles Wendover and Pat, sauntering along in the direction of the boathouse.

He came upon them from behind, and before he reached them he called out:—

"Patricia!"

She started, and turned with an exclamation.

Wendover drew back, stuck his hands in the pockets of his dinner-jacket and laughed.

"That's cool, by Jove!" he muttered, scarcely under his breath.

Christopher came on towards them with a black frown on his face.

"Patricia!"

She remained standing quite still, but she did not, as Wendover expected, say anything expressive of annoyance or surprise.

"What are you doing out here? You will catch cold. Come in with me," said Christopher, scarcely able to control his voice, and speaking, intentionally, with a certain authority.

He was in a reckless mood. He would see whether she dared defy him.

"Do you allow yourself to be dictated to like that, Pat?" asked Giles, in an intentionally offensive and drawling tone.

Christopher, however, took no notice of his words or of his tone. Offering his arm to Patricia, he said, in a gentler, even an affectionate tone:—

"Come in with me, dear."

Wendover uttered a short laugh as for a moment she seemed to hesitate.

"Are you going, Pat?" he asked.

Christopher turned upon him quickly.

"I must ask you," he said, "to cease your use of that nickname in addressing—my wife."

"Your wife!" echoed Wendover, aghast.

And he looked from the one to the other in incredulous amazement.

"It isn't true, is it, Pat?" he asked defiantly.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. Yes," she said hurriedly.

Wendover drew back into the trees; it almost seemed as if he staggered.

"Oh—Oh, well, I congratulate you—I congratulate you both," he said hoarsely, with a sort of savage mockery that turned Christopher's heart to stone within him.

CHAPTER IV

FOR a few moments there was absolute silence. Wendover, among the trees, stared at the other two, though he could scarcely see their faces. Christopher, sick at heart and afraid to ask another question, stood in front of Patricia, who, with her hands behind her, and a scared look on her face, trembled like a leaf, but offered no word of protest, or explanation, or inquiry.

Then Christopher said:—

"Patricia, won't you come with me? I want to speak to you."

For one moment she hesitated. Then, with the old petulance, which at that moment had a most refreshing sound to his ears, she said:—

"Well, what do you want to say? I'm angry with you, offended with you. You said you'd keep it a secret till I wanted it known, and now you've spoilt all the fun, and given it away."

Christopher heard these words with rapture. If there had been anything more on her conscience than childish feats of daring and indiscretions which were blameless in themselves, though they were disconcerting to her friends, she would not, he felt, have taken that tone with him just then.

She had had her fun spoilt, and she resented it, that was all.

She turned to Giles Wendover.

"You see you missed your chance, and now you're sorry. I would have married you, and you were too careful on *my* account to risk it. Now you can't. Mr. Thorne isn't so much afraid of responsibility, and so I've married him."

Her tone was one of childish, daring pique, which half-reassured and half-displeased her husband. To listen to her, he could not feel quite sure that she was not more pleased to be able to annoy and astound Giles Wendover with the news of her marriage than to accept the love of the man who had given her his name that morning.

Wendover was recovering from the stupefaction into which the news had thrown him. He was in love with Pat in his fashion; he thought her the handsomest and most charming girl he knew; it was with her he chose to dance if he danced at all; it would have been upon Pat that he would have bestowed the priceless treasure of his hand if he had been actually forced and driven into marrying somebody.

Now, therefore, just when he had been enjoying a most agreeable flirtation with her in the moonlight, listening to her babyish prattlings and replying to them in words which were meant to burn, with glances which he flattered himself were all conquering, to find that he had been tricked, deceived, and that the girl whom he looked upon as still ready to jump at him if she had the chance was really already the bride of another man, was a shock from which it took time to recover.

He was annoyed with Pat, piqued, angry; but for Christopher he felt something far more keen and strong than mere annoyance. He hated this man who had supplanted him, and it made no difference to his feeling to know that it was entirely his own fault that Christopher had been allowed to come in between them.

Giles bent his head low before Pat as she uttered her reproachful words, in the straightforward and simple manner habitual to her. "Well, my loss is his gain," he said.

"Come, Patricia," said Christopher again.

She hesitated a moment more, and then let him take her hand and draw it through his arm.

"Do the others know?" asked Giles insolently.

Pat moved impatiently, and Christopher answered, throwing the words over his shoulder:—

"Better go and ask them."

"All right," said Giles as he turned sharply, and walked towards the house at a great rate.

Pat looked after him and abruptly withdrew her hand from her husband's arm.

"What is he going to say to them? I wish he wouldn't!" she said. "It's all gone wrong. I had meant to tell it to everybody in my own way, at my own time, and now it's all spoilt. I wish I hadn't done it at all!"

Christopher, for the first moment wounded by this speech, suddenly made up his mind to take it differently, and burst out laughing. He could afford to laugh now, so strongly had it been borne in upon him

that her conduct throughout had been too silly, to preposterous to be anything but the result of the mo innocent and absurd childishness. But at the sam time there was something to reflect upon in the abs lute lightness of heart, the unthinking levity, wit which, disappointed in not receiving the expecte offer from one man, she had yielded to the persuasion of another, and appeared to have no better reason t give for the action that was to affect her whole lif than that it was "such fun."

"You absurd little darling!" he said, and he sa her shrink as if the passion in his tone hurt her, "yo don't know what you're saying. What does it matte who knows, or when they know? Don't you kno that it's not the affair of an hour, a day, your marriag and mine? That you're mine, my own wife, for ou lives? Patricia, kiss me, kiss me, darling, and sa you forgive me for doing what I had to do, for telling your mother what we were going to do. Oh, m darling, my darling, you don't know what I've don for you, what I've risked, because I couldn't lose th chance of having you for my own, own wife!"

He had lost command of himself, and was pourin these passionate words into her ears, not with th measured cadence he had taken care to use with h until now, but with the overwhelming passion whic possessed him sounding in every word, throbbin through every tone.

He had laid his hand upon her, but oh, so gentl that, wilful and disconcerting as she was, she did no




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try to get away from him. Indeed she listened to what he said without the least repugnance, but with something like bewilderment, with the surprise of one who hears thunder where she had expected the humming of bees.

"Don't, don't. Giles may be watching!" she whispered, as Christopher drew her slowly to him and kissed her on the throat. "Let's—let's go indoors."

She made him lead her to the drawing-room, and as they entered every face turned in their direction, and they knew that Giles had not been slow to impart the information he had acquired.

Lady Gane beckoned to Pat as she came in.

"So you've been and gone and done it, have you, child?" she said, as she drew her towards her, and gave her a little affected kiss with her scarlet lips. "Why did you? You might have done ever so much better than a country attorney's son," she added, subduing her voice a little, but not very much, in spite of the fact that Christopher was near.

"Oh, I don't know why I did it, I'm sure," answered Pat, not subduing her voice at all. "He persuaded me, and I thought it would be fun to spring it upon you all. You know how you and Myra are always lording it over me because you're married and I'm not, and how you always say I mustn't see this or that piece, or read this or that book because I'm not married. Well, now you can't talk like that any more."

Lady Gane and Harry Mirfield, the young man of

twenty-one or two who was always about with her and who was holding her fan at the moment, both laughed heartily at this, and Pat grew crimson.

While they were still laughing at her the door opened, and Mrs. Aylwin, sparkling and effervescing as usual with a sort of clumsy imitation of French vivacity which went perilously near frank British vulgarity, ran into the room and threw her arms round her young sister, who was many inches taller than herself, and infinitely handsomer both of figure and feature.

"So glad! So glad, dear!" she cried effusively, as she put up her face and invited her sister to kiss her. "It was really time you did make up your mind, you know. Now you can do what you like, and really you were always giving us fits before, weren't you?"

"Oh, don't make such a fuss about it!" said Pat crossly. "There is nothing to make a fuss about, and it won't make any difference, and we didn't mean anybody to know. Mr. Thorne is going back to Yorkshire to-morrow, and I shall just stay here, and everything will go on as before."

"Oh, no," cried Mrs. Alywin, "it won't. You must come and stay with me, in your proper name, and we can go about together and have some fun. You wouldn't like her to call herself anything but Mrs Thorne, now, would you?"

And Mrs. Aylwin turned to Christopher, who stood listening to this talk with anything but a quiet mind.

But Pat spoke before he could answer.

"He's going to let me do as I like, of course, now and always, aren't you, Mr. Thorne?"

"I'm not going to let you call me Mr. Thorne," said Christopher good-humoredly. "Unless, of course, you want me to address you as 'Mrs. Thorne.'"

There was a general laugh at her expense, and then Lady Gane asked:—

"But what are you really going to do? I don't quite understand what the programme is."

"There is no programme," said Pat quickly. "Mr. Th—Christopher is going to Yorkshire, to see what his father says. And then he is coming back to take a house in town. Aren't you?"

And she turned to her husband, not raising her eyes.

"Well, I don't know about the house in town," he said. "I must see what he says. It will be a house somewhere though, certainly."

Lady Gane raised her eyebrows, which were beautifully arched and black against a pink background.

"You don't mean to suggest, I suppose," she said in her languid dreamy tones, "anything so horrid as the exile of poor Pat at Barnsfield."

Mrs. Aylwin uttered a little scream and squeezed Pat's arms to her sides and leaned against her in a spasm of exquisite terror.

"Oh, how can you suggest anything so perfectly awful, Lorna? Of course Christopher would never think of taking the poor child away from her people and her friends."

"A wife is supposed to take her husband's people and her husband's friends, I think, Mrs. Aylwin."

"Not when the husband's friends live at Barnsfield," retorted Mrs. Alywin with vivacity.

And everybody tried to look shocked and not to twitter.

Christopher kept his temper.

"I'm sure Patricia——"

"I wish you wouldn't call her 'Patricia.' We always say 'Pat,'" interrupted Mrs. Aylwin again.

"I prefer to call her by her real name, which I think a beautiful one," said Christopher, gravely.

He was beginning to find it rather hard to reply civilly to the remarks of his sisters-in-law, who looked at him with the frank impertinence of high-born dames who find that their relation has made a terrible *mésalliance,* and try to make the best of it with martyrlike fortitude.

"Oh, well, dear, I suppose you'll have to get used to it," said Mrs. Aylwin, turning to Patricia.

"Well," persisted Lady Gane once more, "you'd better come up to town and stay with me, Pat, while things are being settled. Now that the secret's known you'd much better go about as Mrs. Thorne than stay here and make people wonder. For, of course, everybody will know all about it by to-morrow, and you'll simply be overwhelmed. And, of course, there'll be wedding-presents coming."

"I should much prefer that there were none," said Christopher.



Lady Gane turned upon him with her artificial smile.

"Oh, but what has that to do with it? There will be presents, there are bound to be. People—her friends—won't ask whether she wants them. And I can assure you she will have some handsome ones, that will be a real help in setting up housekeeping."

Her tone of patronage irritated Christopher almost beyond the bounds of endurance, and he had to wait a moment before he could subdue his tone to the right pitch of gentleness as he said mildly:—

"Patricia has not married an absolute pauper, Lady Gane, indeed."

"Pauper! Oh, no, of course not. But still, every little helps, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Aylwin struck in:—

"And she wants some diamonds, poor thing! You'll be able to wear diamonds now you're married, Pat. Here's something to start with."

She took off her own arm a bracelet in which an emerald of considerable size and beauty shone surrounded by diamonds, and she clasped the jewel on her younger sister's arm.

"Oh, Myra, how lovely! How good of you! May I really keep it?" asked Pat.

But Christopher interfered. Taking the bracelet off his bride's arm very gently, and saying to her softly,

"Allow me, dear," he returned it to Mrs. Aylwin, and said: "I'd rather, I think, that her first jewels should come from me."

"Oh, but she may have to wait such a long time!" said Myra quickly.

"Not longer, I hope, than she'll be willing to wait, when she knows how strong my wishes on the subject are," said Christopher in the same gentle, grave voice.

Mrs. Aylwin giggled, shrugged her shoulders, arched her eyebrows, and gave a glance around her with her large green-grey prominent eyes, as if to say that she washed her hands of this unhappy business.

Pat slipped away from her husband and allowed herself to be commiserated by her eldest sister.

"My dear, these Yorkshiremen!" murmured Lady Gane, "they're too awful—descended from cattle-breeders, I suppose, and so they look upon their wives as they would upon sheep! Love, honour and obey, and all that. I suppose it's still practised in Barnsfield."

Christopher heard most, if not all of this. Perhaps it was intended that he should. For it was not in human nature that Lady Gane and Mrs. Aylwin, who looked upon themselves as such very smart and important persons, should care for the autocratic airs assumed by this insignificant countryman, with nothing but his good looks to recommend him in their eyes.

But he did not linger long to listen to their disparaging comments. Crossing the room to the corner where Mrs. Goldsmith was discussing the event of the day with two or three of her young guests, he drew the lady aside, and said low in her ear:—

"I want to carry Patricia off with me, Mrs. Goldsmith, and I want you to connive at the kidnapping."

"What! To-night! Will she go?"

"I'm going to try. If she disappears, you will know where she is, and that she is with her husband."

"Oh, very well," said his mother-in-law, with a doubtful look. "But she won't go, I'm sure."

He withdrew, and bided his time. Perhaps he guessed what was going to happen. Certain it is that when, after half an hour's more excitement and chatter with her sisters and friends, Pat suddenly said: "Leave me alone for a little while. My head aches," and ran through the hall into the conservatory, and stood in the open doorway inhaling the fresh night air, Christopher lost not a second in following her. Seizing her in his arms, he pressed her head against his breast, and whispered:—

"You are tired, darling. Come away with me, and be quiet. Come, Patricia. Your mother knows I'm going to take you if I can. May I?"

He was so gentle, so tender, so absolutely changed from the passionate lover of an hour ago into the kind and coaxing friend, that Patricia, who was worn out with excitement, wept a little quite comfortably, before she answered coherently.

"Where would you take me?" she asked at last, looking up like a child, with a final sob.

"Anywhere you like. Anywhere where you could rest and be quiet."

She hesitated just one moment, then she let her head

fall once more on his breast, and, like a tired child, murmured:—

"Yes. I think I should like it."

Out from a corner behind him he whipped the long cloak and hat and gloves he had asked for, and the little dressing-bag which, by Mrs. Goldsmith's care, had been put with them. Dressing her with his own hands, uttering soothing words the while, he had her, within five minutes, outside the door of the Heronry, and in the open road.

Under the trees in the darkness he gave her one gentle kiss, then drew her hand through his arm, and carrying the little dressing-bag in his other hand, carried her off in triumph.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTOPHER and Pat had been married a fortnight, and were in the middle of an unconventional honeymoon.

On the night when he carried off his bride in such unexpected and hasty fashion Christopher had not the least idea where he was gong to take her. But getting into the solitary fly that they met coming home empty from the station after the day's work Christopher directed the driver to take them to "a good inn, not too near the river, and within a few miles."

The man, after a minute's consideration, told them that the Green Dragon, at Millhead, three miles away, would, he thought, answer the description.

So to the Green Dragon they went. And as it proved to be a rambling, old-fashioned, modest place, well off the beaten track, and near a stream broad enough to row a boat upon, Christopher decided to put up there for the night at least.

In the morning, however, they discovered that the place had more attraction than they had supposed. For the big garden of mixed flowers and fruit and vegetables behind the inn was a delightful resort, and at the bottom of the garden there was the stream, reported to contain trout.

Pat thought the place delightful, and said so. So

for the first fortnight they spent their days on the stream in an old boat which afforded the strongest possible contrast to the handsome punts and smart skiffs belonging to the Heronry, but which, nevertheless, afforded them the keenest pleasure. To glide for hours under the overhanging boughs of trees that were not scrupulously well attended to, and to make their way slowly through a tangle of weeds and water-lilies, to brew their own tea in a shady nook by the water's edge, to fish unavailingly for hours together, listening to the songs of the birds and the humming of the bees, to watch the flight of the butterflies over the ripening wheat in the cornfields, and to get back, tired and happy, in time for a simple meal of eggs and fish and bread and butter, close by the open window overlooking the garden; these for two weeks had been the occupations of the daring, dashing, spoilt child Pat, and she looked at the end of the time, in spite of a rather deep tint of brown that had taken the place of her naturally creamy complexion, handsomer than at the beginning.

For she looked happy, happier than she had done, while she was at home with her people. This honeymoon within a few miles of her parents' home, with the constant though not great risk of her being seen, "discovered," she called it, by the *habitués* of the Heronry, fulfilled her desires for "romance," and was unconventional enough to please the most exacting of spoilt children.

As the crow flies, not more than three miles from

her father's house, yet actually lost in a locality where nobody would have dreamt of looking for them, the two young people spent their lazy days under summer skies that seemed to have forgotten the use of clouds, and were happy as the day was long.

As for Christopher, he was conscious that he had reached the very summit of the happiness possible for him to attain. Every doubt and fear had disappeared in the knowledge that his bride was as happy with him as she was sweet and lovable; that if she was shrewd of speech and too outspoken for Barnsfield notions of propriety, she was shrewd only as a child is, and as simple in heart as in manner.

Her simplicity, indeed, was sometimes disconcerting, as was also her frankness; for when they had reached the end of their second week, she said one day, with a little satisfied sigh as she sat in the boat surrounded by the wild flowers she had been picking: —

"I wonder if I should have been as happy as I am now, if I'd married Giles Wendover."

"Good gracious! No, of course you wouldn't!" said Christopher indignantly.

She put her head on one side thoughtfully.

"You think not?" she said.

"Well, do you think that selfish fellow is capable of caring for any woman as I care for you?"

"Well, perhaps not—for long. But after all, I don't know yet whether you will care for me for long."

He stared at her aghast, in spite of his acquaintance with her matter-of-fact habits of thought.

"Don't know whether I shall care for you for long, Pat?"— in spite of himself he had fallen into the habit of calling her by the name she preferred—"You don't mean that surely? Do you think a man takes a wife as he would take an apple?"

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Well, I believe you're the sort of man who would care longer than Giles."

"Oh, don't talk about him!"

"But I must. And listen, what I'm going to say is all to your advantage. I was going to say I know you will be nice longer, far longer, than Giles would have been. But still, I suppose, at first he would have been nice and I should have been happy, shouldn't I?"

Christopher frowned in vague uneasiness.

"I don't like you even to have such thoughts," he said, "or to make such comparisons. I should have thought a wife who had only just married a man who loves her as I do you wouldn't have thought about other men at all."

"Oh, well, since we're only a few miles away, I must think of all the people, It's fun to wonder what they're doing—of course the Heronry will be full again to-day—and whether they're wondering where we are, and what *we* are doing!"

"What does it matter to them?"

"Oh, nothing of course. Only it's fun to wonder, and beside I can't help wondering, whether it's Myra who has come down to-day, or John—that's her husband. They never come together, you know. I won-

der whether we—you and I—shall be like that presently!"

"Good heavens, Pat, what are you talking about? Of course we shan't. You married me for love, didn't you? Not for money, as your sister married Aylwin."

"Oh, yes, of course. At least I suppose I did, though really, Chris, I didn't like you half so well as I do now. I didn't know how nice you could be, and and how—how gentle—and oh, quite different from what I thought. I thought——"

"Well," said Christopher gently, smiling in spite of himself, though rather ruefully, for some of Pat's words had a sting in them, though she did not know it. They showed him how irresponsibly she had slipped into marriage, with what a charming sense of doing something surprising, and by what a slender thread he held her. "And what did you think about me?"

"Well, I thought—though really I would rather not have to say it—that you might bore me a little perhaps, that you might be rather heavy in your conversation and want me to be superior and all that. You seemed to disapprove so strongly of Myra and Lorna that I thought you might disapprove of me, too, you know."

"But you're not like them; I should be very sorry to think you were," said Christopher hastily.

"Why? There's no harm in my sisters. I'm very fond of them. And I'm not going to quarrel with them, you know, just because I've married you."

He smiled indulgently.

"I should be sorry to make you quarrel with anybody. But I don't think you are like your sisters, and I hope you will never be."

"What is it you don't like in them?"

"They seem to be selfishly devoted to their own pleasure and not to care what people say or what people

"And do you think that one ought to be a slave think, for one thing."

to what other people think? That's provincial, you know," said Pat, with superior and rather irritating knowledge. "In London people are so easy-going. As long as you keep certain rules—and they're easy ones —you can do as you please nowadays. Mamma says the difference is enormous since her day, when you had to do just what other people did, and to wear what other people wore, or be out of it altogether. Is it still like that in Yorkshire?"

Christopher hesitated.

"Perhaps it is—more than down here," he admitted. "But we needn't go into that. You are not likely to do anything to shock anybody. You've given up even your cigarettes to please me, haven't you?"

"Well, but I don't say I've given them up for ever," said Pat. "Why should I? There's really no more harm in a woman's smoking than in a man's, is there?"

"Harm, no. But there are many things a man can do that I shouldn't expect to see you do."

"For instance?"

"Well, ride astride, for instance. There's no harm

in that. But yet I shouldn't like to see you do it. Or smoke a pipe in a boat as you lie on your back with your knees crossed. There's no harm whatever in that, or in a dozen things that men do, that I certainly shouldn't care to see done by my wife."

Pat was smiling with great amusement.

"Lie on my back with a pipe in my mouth! Oh, but that's horrid. That's not the same thing as smoking just a tiny cigarette, in a pretty mouthpiece like the one Giles gave me."

Christopher frowned. Then he tried to look as if he had not done so.

"No, of course it isn't exactly the same thing, but the reasons against it are fundamentally the same. There's more variety and colour and pleasure in life when the sexes don't try to be too much alike, when they follow their natural bent—the bent of the majority. Am I growing 'heavy'? Am I boring you?" he asked, suddenly breaking off to bring his head closer to hers, to take a long look into her blue eyes and then to kiss her.

"Not at all. I'm not so empty-headed as you think. I'm going to surprise everybody by turning out clever some day," said Pat solemnly. "Go on with your lecture."

"I think I'd got to the end of it. There's no harm in a man's smoking a pipe, or in a woman's making a lace handkerchief. But I shouldn't care to see the woman with the pipe or the man making the lace. There's more 'fun,' as you would say, in life when

each keeps to his own natural pursuits, or to the pursuits which we've grown to think natural."

She remained very silent for a minute. Then she said gravely:—

"I perceive that I shall shock you horribly some day. I shall break out in some way, and—oh, well, we needn't anticipate, as the stories say. But a time *will* come——"

And Pat nodded her handsome head several times with gravity which was only half-playful.

Perhaps Christopher had his own qualms, too, but he agreed with her in thinking it a pity to spoil a delightful time by unpleasant forebodings. If only he could feel a little more sure of her! If only she would not break out, as she did from time to time, into comments about the people at the Heronry, as if she would have liked to go back there and see—just see, what they were doing, and how they were getting on without her!

Christopher had said very little to his bride about their future plans, and she was much too happy-go-lucky by temperament and by circumstances to worry him on the subject. She on her side had no doubt whatever but that she would get what she wanted and that Christopher and she would settle in town, where she imagined, in her ignorance, that he, being "very clever," and all that, would soon be making a handsome income like John Aylwin.

Christopher, however, had been thinking things over seriously, and he had ended by writing fully to

his father, informing him that he had married a lady whom he described, with, perhaps, a stretch of the truth, as "in every way suitable," and that his wooing of the lady had been the "important business" which had detained him in town six weeks beyond the time allotted to him for his stay there.

His father replied briefly to the effect that he had "guessed as much," and asked what he intended to do.

To this Christopher replied by a long and most dutifully expressed letter, asking what his father's advice in the circumstances would be, and whether he should come back to Barnsfield and help his father in the office, or, in the altered circumstances, whether he should try to find an opening, by partnership or otherwise, in London. He reminded his father that he had always been ready and willing to meet his views in every way, as was only right when he had been so handsomely treated. But he hoped that he would not be looked upon as having exceeded his due measure of independence in marrying without consulting his friends. The circumstances, he explained vaguely, were such that he was forced either to lose the lady, in which case he would have been miserable for life, or to make up his mind at short notice. Following the example which, in serious affairs, his father had always set him, he made up his mind at once.

Old Mr. Thorne replied to this long and carefully worded epistle very shortly and somewhat drily.

He was quite prepared, he wrote, for what he had just heard, and was sure his son had sense enough to know that the step he had taken was a serious one. If Christopher was still anxious to fulfil his father's frequently expressed wish, to settle down in the old business, he had better return to Barnsfield without further delay, as the time was coming when he himself needed a well-earned rest, and if by that time his son were not ready to take up the business, somebody else must be found who would be.

In that case young Christopher would better make his own arrangements for his future, unhampered by any desires or intentions on his father's part.

Knowing his father, Christopher felt that the letter looked ugly. Old Mr. Thorne was not the man to threaten idly, and since he was prepared to find "somebody else" in default of his son's being ready to take up the business, Christopher knew that he would do so, if necessary.

In that case, though Christopher had no doubt of being able to scrape a living somewhere and somehow, it would certainly for some years fall short of what Pat expected quite naturally in the way of income and pin-money.

Pat, who was eating buttered toast in a wicker chair by the window while Christopher read his letter at the breakfast-table, saw the grave look on his face.

"What's the matter, Chris?" she asked.

"Well, dear, I'm sorry to bother you so soon with worrying details, but it's a letter from my father, and

he wants to know whether I'm ready to go back at once to Barnsfield and settle down in his office."

"And are you?" asked Pat simply.

Chris hesitated.

"I don't know, Pat," he said.

"Don't know?"

"Well, it depends upon—you."

"Me! How?"

"Would you be willing to go, too? And settle down in a dull Yorkshire town, among people whom you'd regard as very dull?"

Pat sat up.

"Supposing," she suggested brightly, "that you take me up there to see? When I've been there, I shall be able to tell you better whether I can do it or whether I can't."

Christopher smiled. She took matters in such a delightfully irresponsible way, a way that might be disconcerting, dangerous by and by, but which was utterly fascinating in these early days.

"If you can manage it, Pat, it will simplify matters considerably," he said earnestly. "For I know I can earn a good income there. The business is an old, established one, and can be extended, I think, and you could have a nice house and everything you wanted in the way of dress and all that. While if you decided you couldn't——"

Pat was growing quite interested. She interrupted him.

"Let us try," she said. "Let us go up and you can

introduce me, and see whether I get on with your people."

"I'm rather afraid you'll find them very—different from yours."

"Oh, very strict and proper and good. Yes, of course. But I'll be so careful they shan't guess how wicked I really am," said Pat scoffingly. "And look here, Chris, it's beginning to be dull here, isn't it? I should love a change! And you can run over to the Heronry with a list of the things I shall want. There's my rose-silk—I must have that—it's too sweet for anything. And some muslin frocks I've not tried on yet. And my new hat, the big one with the shaded feathers. I must have them all. I want your people to see me looking nice, very nice."

She was all excitement at the thought of the fresh change.

Christopher, however, looked rueful.

"My dear child," he said, "the simple frocks you've been wearing here——" he had had to fetch two more already, in the most roundabout and secret way, from the Heronry—"are much, much handsomer than anything my sisters ever wear or have ever seen."

Pat looked at him and laughed incredulously.

"Oh, yes, I daresay," she remarked with scorn. "That's the sort of thing Papa always says. But I know it isn't true, and that it only means you don't want to be bothered with lots of luggage. But I must have my own way over this. For really it would be a pity not to show my things. They're perfectly

sweet. And remember, I've not even had a trousseau, so you mustn't deny me the pleasure of wearing the few nice things I've got!"

She was growing quite plaintive. Of course the young husband had to give way. And when, after writing to tell his father and mother that Patricia was longing to see them and that he was bringing her up to Barnsfield at once, they started on their journey to Yorkshire they took with them about as many trunks, portmanteaux, and dress-baskets as would have sufficed a *prima donna* for a season in Paris.

CHAPTER VI

IT was on a hot day at the end of July that Christopher and his wife arrived at Barnsfield, by the train that was timed to reach the station at 5.28.

"We shall be in time for dinner at any rate. And I'm quite hungry," said Pat, as the train approached the station.

"Dinner! My dear child, they dine at half-past one," said Christopher.

Pat looked puzzled.

"Half-past one!" she echoed. "What! Don't they have anything to eat after that?"

"Oh, yes, of course. My mother and sisters have their tea at five. And when my father comes back from the office, which is about six or sometimes later, he has an abomination called high tea. Tea with an egg, or something of that sort."

Pat looked rather dismayed.

"We shan't have to live like that while we stay here," she said anxiously, "shall we?"

"While we stay at my father's house we must, of course. It's beastly, I confess," he added with a sudden and unusual show of irritation.

It was becoming increasingly evident to him, as he drew near once more to the home he had now been away from for a long time, except for short intervals



which he had not always enjoyed, that he had idealised his home a good deal during his long absence, and that the reality would probably prove nearly as shocking to him as it certainly would to Patricia.

A thousand trifles which he had forgotten had been pressing upon his memory during this journey, so that it was with a great deal more dread than pleasure that he looked forward to the visit he and his wife had to pay to the parental roof.

He glanced at Pat as she sat opposite him in the compartment.

Tired, warm, disordered as she was after the long journey, during which she had been very restless and impatient, she looked, he thought, a very picture in her smart, well-cut travelling dress of serge of a rather bright shade of navy blue, with braiding of a dull shade of gold, and with a pouched under-bodice of cream-coloured silk heavily embroidered in scarlet, blue and gold. Her neat travelling hat was of dark blue to match her dress, trimmed with quills and a veil of the same shade, while tan boots and long elbow-length tan suède gloves completed her costume.

He bent forward suddenly and gave her a kiss—for they were alone in the carriage—just as the train drew into the station.

"Keep up your spirits," he said to her abruptly. "We shall both need all we've got. For I must tell you that you won't like it at all."

"Thought not," said Pat laconically.

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husband's ever-increasing depression, against which he openly but in vain struggled hard, had confirmed her in her belief.

"Oh, there they are!"

It was Christopher who uttered these words, in no tone of joy.

Pat looked out, and saw on the platform two girls, in the twenties apparently, one of whom was very tall, and the other only of medium height. The former had exquisite golden hair, and a face which might have been fairly good-looking but for two defects, the one a look of persistent discontent, and the other a dyspeptic flush which included her nose.

The other was not so tall, and had a sweet, rather pretty, feminine face. Both were fairly well dressed in light skirts and blouses, with commonplace straw hats, and both were predestined old maids, the one by reason of her evident ill-temper, and the other for the opposite reason, that her good-humour designed her from the first for the household drudge, the one who was always to stand back to efface herself.

"Who?" asked Pat in a whisper to her husband, who was standing up and filling the window of the compartment.

"My sisters, Carrie and Millie. Let me introduce them."

They had come up to the carriage door and kissed their brother, and then turned, full of eager curiosity and interest, to be introduced to their new sister-in-law.

Pat had a relieved feeling that they were not quite so bad as she expected, and offered her face to each of them to kiss with a quiet air which they mistook for anything but what it was—shyness.

They all got into a fly, and Christopher ordered a second fly for his wife's luggage. His sisters looked aghast at this extravagance, so that he spoke to them impatiently. This caused a slight feeling of constraint, to which Pat tried to put an end by asking questions about the place, the answers to which were not very satisfactory from her point of view.

Had they a tennis-court? No, but they belonged to a club.

"Oh, but don't you hate that? You have to meet all sorts of people!" said Pat rashly.

The girls looked surprised.

"It's the only opportunity we have of meeting anybody," said Millie, the amiable sister.

Carrie laughed uneasily.

"Oh, nonsense, Millie. I'm sure we meet plenty of people," she said. "And very good people, too. There are the Bagshaws."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Millie humbly.

The drive was not very long, and Pat, who was anxious and fatigued, was glad when they drew up at the gate of a prim little forecourt or front garden to a commonplace modern red-brick house, with white lace curtains and blue flower-boxes in the windows.

It was a horrid house, and her face betrayed her opinion—not, happily, to the girls, who were looking

out for their mother, but to the watchful eyes of her husband, who quite agreed with her.

He helped her out, and hurried her up the stone-flagged prim path to the front-door, where Mrs. Thorne, a gentle, prim, insignificant-looking old lady, held up her arms and kissed her rather timidly.

"Is this Patricia? Why, how tall you are, my dear! From what Chris said, I thought you were a little creature!"

"How absurd, Mother! I'm sure nothing in his letters ever made me think that," said Carrie, who always snubbed her mother on every possible occasion.

"Your father has come home early on purpose to meet you," said Mrs. Thorne, with an air of announcing something which ought to fill them both with joy and pride.

And at that moment a door at the end of a passage opened, and old Mr. Thorne, who bore, Patricia thought, an uncanny likeness to his son, though he was one of the most repulsive-looking men she had ever seen, came out and kissed her, making her struggle heard to repress a shudder.

Old Christopher Thorne was not a nice man, and he did not look like one. Though much shorter than his handsome son, he had probably been, in his youth, good-looking also; but the evil passions of avarice, and cunning and others still less attractive had so worked into the expression of his eyes and the very lines of his features, that his appearance to a young girl was little less than repellant.

The keen-eyed old Yorkshireman took the measure of the beautiful woman his son had married almost before he had said a dozen words to her. He had noted her good looks, her splendid figure, and he had noted also the costly nature of her dress, and knew, country fellow though he was, that the simply cut dress had cost more money than his own wife's best satin gown with the "real" white lace collar and cuffs.

"Come into the parl—dining room, my dear," he said, as he opened the door on his left and led her into just such a room as the outside of the house had prepared her for, furnished in old mahogany, marble clock on mantelpiece, "The Relief of Lucknow," a huge engraving, over the sideboard, a portrait of the Duke of Wellington, another engraving, over the hard-looking sofa. As she said afterwards to her sister, "The room only just stopped short of crochet antimacassars."

The rest of the house, Pat soon found, was in harmony with this room. Everything was old, ugly, unpleasantly tidy, hard, cold, bare and expensively mean.

It was one of those houses where there is never anything in particular to do, and where everybody is always doing it furiously. Mrs. Thorne was a good housewife, always in a fever about some totally unimportant matter, and although she kept two servants, and the ladies of the house did most of the cooking and most of the housemaid's work, she never could keep her maids. Therefore the two she was sup-

posed to have often dwindled down to one, and sometimes to none at all, involving always a fearful domestic turmoil over the instruction of the new ones.

At this present juncture she had just engaged a new cook, and even the excitement of her son's return with his bride did not put the domestic trouble out of Mrs. Thorne's housewifely head.

"Only fancy, Chris," said she, "the new cook wanted to bring her bicycle! Did you ever hear of such a thing? I told her of course I couldn't have *that*."

"But why not, Mother?" asked Christopher mildly. "Where's the harm of having a bicycle?"

Mrs. Thorne turned with pitying eyes to her daughter-in-law.

"Now what do you think of that, my dear Patricia? Isn't it like a man, not to see the harm of the cook's having a bicycle?"

Pat laughed rather shyly.

"I'm afraid you would be shocked with Mamma then," she said. "She lets all the maids keep bicycles, and they have a piano in the servants' hall, and I believe one of the housemaids plays the mandolin."

"The servants' hall!" echoed Carrie in a peculiar tone. "I suppose that's what we call the kitchen!"

Pat grew crimson, and perceived that she was suspected of "side."

"Yes, oh, yes," she said quickly.

Christopher grew angry at this attempt to snub poor Patricia, who was only anxious not to offend anybody's susceptibilities.

"We say kitchen in our little houses," he said. "But in a big establishment like Mrs. Goldsmith's there is always a sitting-room for the servants."

Poor Patricia, perceiving that Carrie took this ill said quickly:—

"Oh, I believe Mamma often calls it the kitchen, because it was only after Papa had got on that she had more than two or three maids."

"You'll find it hard to put up with our quiet ways, after your big house and grounds, and carriages I suppose, too!" suggested Mrs. Thorne kindly.

Patricia had been taken into the spare-room to take her hat off, and was now enjoying the "high tea" to which Christopher had so strong an objection.

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "It's beautiful here. Not so many stairs to go up, or—or such a long way to go to get about."

She said this with the most simple wish to say something that was just right, but Carrie raised her eyebrows and looked at her sister, who smiled a little, but not ill-naturedly.

"And you have a motor-car, I suppose?" suggested Millie.

"Well, we have one, but it's a beast," said Patricia. "Mamma is nervous in a car, and, though I shouldn't like him to hear me say so, I believe Papa is, too. So they stick to their old gee-gees, and all my brothers' persuasions won't induce him to buy a really nice car."

"Well, I suppose it is better than none," said Carrie sharply. "Do you drive yourself?"

"Yes, I've driven it a few times, but I mean to wait till I get a good one to take to it seriously. But I can drive horses; I drive the pair in a phaeton, and I've driven four-in-hand, too," said Patricia simply.

"Driven four-in-hand! Weren't you afraid?" asked Mrs. Thorne in some alarm, as if she thought her daughter-in-law might have brought undesirable habits with her into their peaceful and virtuous home.

"Oh, no," laughed Pat. "I liked it."

"And where was that?" asked Carrie, rather interested, though she was shocked, too.

"Down at Grey's Heath, Lord Gainsford's place. There was a big stable there, bigger than our own, and we went a buster and drove a coach up and down to London every day."

"Who did?" asked Carrie tremulously.

"Oh, my brothers, and one of my sisters, and I—and—and, oh, a lot of us."

A ghastly vision of the unholy pranks which must have been played at Lord Gainsford's sprang before the mental eyes of the family, and held them silent for a moment. Then Mrs. Thorne said gently:—

"I'm afraid you'll find us dreadfully slow after all your grand lords and ladies, Patricia."

The bride, who was crimson with mortification at the mess she was making of her reception, hastened to say:—

"Oh, but we weren't staying with the Gainsfords. We only took their house for the season. That's what City people do; they take a place like that, so that

they can talk about it, and make people think they're friends of the people the house belongs to."

Carrie was mollified by this simple speech, and laughed.

"But I should think you were grand enough for anybody, when you can live as you do."

Patricia laughed.

"Oh, no," she said. "There's a barrier between us City people and these others that you can't pass. I don't know that we particularly want to pass it," she went on brightly, "but if we did we couldn't. These titled people are very friendly when they let us their houses on extravagant terms, and when we go to their bazaars and pay ever so much more for the things they sell than they're worth. But they only make use of our money, and we retaliate, for we make use of their names. We talk about Lord This and Lady That, when the acquaintance is only what I've said."

This speech luckily had the effect of amusing and mollifying everybody, and the girls decided that there was no harm in their new sister-in-law, while Mrs. Thorne laughed till she cried at her amusing simple descriptions and old Christopher Thorne from his corner noted everything and took a stronger and ever stronger impression concerning his daughter-in-law.

When they went into the stiff drawing-room Patricia confirmed the good impressions she had made by expressing admiration of the girls' accomplishments, which were commonplace enough and irritated their brother almost beyond endurance.

But on the whole poor Patricia, who grew more and more silent as the evening went on, was glad when it was suggested by gentle Mrs. Thorne that she must be tired, and she was allowed to retire to the spare room.

The girls uttered comments upon her that were, on the whole, complimentary.

"She is very good-looking," said Carrie. "But she thinks a lot of herself, and what a lot of attention she expects from the gentlemen!"

Millie sighed.

"And you can see that she gets it," she added. "Did you ever see such a change as in Chris? Doesn't he worship her?"

Now this comment would have surprised Christopher, who flattered himself that he had successfully hidden every spark of the intense admiration he had for his lovely wife. He took care to make no remark at all to his father upon the subject of Patricia, when they were alone together that night. And old Mr. Thorne was almost equally reticent, merely asking whether her parents were rich people.

"They live like rich people," answered his son frankly. "But I very much doubt whether Mr. Goldsmith will leave anything much when he dies. I may be wrong, but I gather that they are people who live well up to their income."

Old Mr. Thorne nodded without comment, and did not keep his son up long that night.

When Christopher got upstairs he found Patricia

blue in the face, with one corner of a pillow thrust into her mouth.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked he as he ran up to her.

She took out the pillow and buried her head in his shoulder.

"Oh, Chris," she said in a broken whisper, "they're all very sweet and very nice, and your mother's an old dear. But, Chris, if I had to live with them I should drown myself!"

Christopher sighed heavily.

He thought so, too.

In the meantime old Mr. Thorne was discussing the newcomer with his wife.

"Christopher," said she earnestly, "do you think this grand new wife of his will settle down quietly to life in Barnsfield?"

"Of course she won't," said the shrewd old man contemptuously. "And, of course, if she were to, she would be the ruin of the boy. Whatever he can make she will spend, and whatever we might leave him she would spend, too. No, no. She must be got rid of, she must be got rid of."

"Oh, Christopher, what do you mean?" asked the poor old lady, with unnamed fears in her simple mind. "How can we—can he get rid of her?"

Old Mr. Thorne grunted.

"He won't have to," he said shortly. "Just leave things alone, and all will come right. She will go

back to her own people, and—he can be free by the time he's tired of her."

Mrs. Thorne laughed feebly, choosing to look upon this as a ferocious jest. But it was not a jest: it was the result of keen observation on the part of a shrewd man, a man who was unscrupulous also as to the means by which he attained his ends.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day was a trying one for poor Patricia. With the best intentions towards her daughter-in-law, old Mrs. Thorne did the worst possible thing for her and for them all.

Anxious to take advantage of the good nature of which Patricia had given ample proof, in order to conciliate her husband and to show him that the dreaded bride was a perfectly domestic and harmless creature after all, whom it would not be necessary to "get rid of" in the dreadful if vague way he had suggested, the old lady from the first set about showing Patricia the "ways of the house," in order that she might fall into them and conform to the new duties expected of her.

Patricia began badly by coming down late to the eight o'clock breakfast, after missing family prayers.

She made her peace very prettily, with a surprised look on her face which was resented by Carrie, who was on the alert for the "airs" which she expected the bride to put on.

Her costume was the next offence. Poor Pat, already very much ashamed of the space taken up by her trunks, to which a special room had had to be allotted, appeared at the breakfast-table in a gown

of pink embroidered lawn with real lace at the throat and wrists, which would have been looked upon as commonplace at the Heronry, but which created a sensation at the Barnsfield villa.

She felt Carrie's eye upon her throughout the meal, and told Chris afterwards that she could see his sister counting the stitches in the sleeves. Another mistake she made was in wearing, at this early hour of the day, a string of very small real pearls round her throat, and pinned on to her breast a tiny watch, and the little brooch that fastened it on was studded with diamonds. There was a diamond, too, in the bangle she wore.

So that the costume which she had flattered herself was pretty and yet simple enough to please them all was really ground for serious displeasure in the provincial family.

Millie was the least terrible of the three women of the family. Patricia had already made up her mind on this point. For old Mrs. Thorne, while most kind-hearted and good-natured, was absolutely devoid of tact, and so ignorant of any sort of life outside her own limited range of vision that she made mistakes which Patricia could scarcely hear without laughter.

Carrie, on the other hand, while far more intelligent than her mother, was much less amiable, and took an open delight in putting the bride in her place, and in trying to prove to her how far superior the institutions of Barnsfield were to those of the south.

But Millie was gentler and seemed rather sorry for

her sister-in-law, and anxious to make her feel at ease in her new surroundings.

Unfortunately, she counted for less in the family conclave than either her mother or Carrie, so that her timid support was not so effective as was the open antagonism of Carrie, or the fussy attempts of the old lady to put Patricia right where she was wrong.

After breakfast the two men started together for the office of old Mr. Thorne, Chris with an uneasy feeling in his heart on behalf of his young wife, left, as she whispered, "among the lions and tigers."

And then the real troubles of the day began. Old Mrs. Thorne asked Patricia what she would like to do, whether she would care to look over her things and see whether there was any mending to be done.

"Or brushing. There is generally a good deal to be done in that way to one's things after a journey," she suggested cheerfully.

Patricia opened her eyes wide.

"Oh, I never thought of that," she said. "At home——"

She stopped short and grew red. Under this fire of critical if dull eyes she could not mention that at the Heronry her mother's maid, who was hers also now that her sisters were married, did the brushing and mending of her clothes for her.

"Don't you always brush your things well yourself? It saves them so," said Mrs. Thorne. "You will find it necessary to study economy now you're married. You can't think how much money you can save your

husband if only you will look after your things—and his too," she added with a smile.

Patricia laughed.

"I hope Chris won't expect me to mend his coats," she said, thinking she had said something which would be received as a jest.

To her surprise, old Mrs. Thorne answered at once quite seriously:—

"Oh, it's quite easy. I will show you how. I mend all my husband's coats for him, and I can darn as well as a tailor."

"I'm sure I never should," said Pat gravely. "And I shall warn him that he'd better get cast-iron suits in future if he thinks I ought to do the patching when they're old."

Mrs. Thorne did not approve of this levity.

"I should think, my dear, you would be ready to do anything to save him money, just as other wives are," she said solemnly.

"I think," said Pat suddenly, "he might have told me, before he married me, the sort of things I should be expected to do."

And, with the tears very near her eyes, she crossed the room and went to the window, where the canary was hanging. To hide her discomfiture, she began to chirp to the bird softly. Mrs. Thorne trotted after her at once.

"Perhaps you'd like to take the care of the bird on your hands?" she asked with a little engaging smile. "You're fond of live things."

"Yes, I like birds," said Patricia gravely. "But I've only taken care of my own. I don't think I want to look after other people's—just yet."

Amiable as she had tried to be, there was at last a note of impatience in her voice at this constant worrying, which seemed to her to be designed expressly to torment her, but which was, in fact, the result of principle, old Mrs. Thorne being one of those people who can't bear to see any one idle, and who would rather have them waste all their time in doing little things better left undone, than sit "with their hands before them," as she called it.

Millie, however, who noted the tone in the bride's voice and rather dreaded what sort of report Patricia would make to Chris that evening as to the day she had spent among them, came to the rescue.

"Patricia's tired, Mother, to-day, I daresay," she suggested gently. "Perhaps she would rather be left to herself a little, on this first morning, than—than have to do a lot of little things so soon."

Patricia threw at her sister-in-law a most grateful glance, which, however, old Mrs. Thorne caught and was offended by.

"Oh, no doubt. Oh, pray! Oh, do as you like, of course. I only meant—I only thought—people usually like to make themselves at home and settle down. But it's of no consequence, of course. None at all."

And the old lady, much offended, walked across the room to a large workbasket, always full of things to be mended but never finished, owing to the old lady's habit

of fidgeting out of the room to look after something else as soon as she had sat down to work.

Carrie took up the running on behalf of her mother.

"Patricia's too smart to do any work," she said with an acid smile. "Do you usually come down like this the first thing in the morning, or is it only when you're out visiting?" she asked.

Pat grew very red.

"Am I too smart?" she said, with an air of ill-concealed vexation. "I'm sorry. But remember, I've only just come here. I don't yet know how you dress and what you do, and—and everything."

Again the sound of her voice showed that the tears were near.

Millie again came to the rescue.

"You look beautiful," she said admiringly. "But we up here don't make ourselves smart unless we're going out."

Now this sentiment seemed horrible to Patricia. It was exactly the reverse of what she had always been taught, and it shocked her.

"I don't know what I've got," she said desperately, after a moment's thought, "that wouldn't offend anybody. I must write home to my sisters, and get them to send me some things that will please everybody better."

Carrie raised her eyebrows.

"More things!" she exclaimed. "My dear Patricia, wherever will you put them?"

Patricia disliked this colloquial use of the word "wherever," which was another of the things she had been taught to avoid. She sighed helplessly.

"I think," she said, "Chris and I had better go and stay at an hotel, till we've made up our minds what to do. Then we shan't be so much in the way. I was afraid those unfortunate trunks of mine would take up too much room."

This daring proposal cast a bombshell among the ladies. To leave them for an hotel! To quit willingly the quiet respectability, the domestic peace of the villa for the vulgar joys of life at the Midland or the North-Western! It seemed scarcely credible that a modest, decent woman should entertain the idea for a moment seriously.

"I hope you don't mean what you say, my dear," said old Mrs. Thorne, when she was able to take breath. "I should be sorry to think you were one of those wives who think of nothing but their own idle enjoyment, and who find no pleasure in the delights of home and home occupations."

The bride reddened, but spoke more firmly.

"I don't think I am very fond of domestic pleasures," said she, beginning to think it time she let them know she had no intention of spending her life mending stockings and cleaning out the cages of other people's birds. "I daresay I shall settle down to them in time, like other people. But I'm in no hurry to begin one bit sooner than I need."

This speech caused a small sensation. Carrie looked

at her mother with an expression which Pat saw, and which said, as plainly as could be, "I told you so!"

Millie looked rather sorry, and rather frightened. She was a good-hearted girl, and was troubled by the conflict which had already begun between the bride and the forces of the ancient rule.

Patricia, now that she had thrown down the gauntlet, went on in the same tone. It was not defiant, it was not stubborn; but it did distinctly suggest that she conceived she had a right to live her own life in her own way.

"Chris is quite satisfied with what I do, and if I please him, I think I've done enough."

"And don't you think he will be glad to see you taking an interest in your home? Looking after things?" asked Mrs. Thorne, after a pause rendered necessary by the momentous nature of this crisis.

"Oh, yes, when I have a home I suppose I shall look after it. But I haven't got one yet, you know."

"I should have thought," said Mrs. Thorne, more mildly, but with an evident effort, "that you would have been pleased and proud to be received in the home of your husband's people as if you were a member of the household. We were only too delighted to receive you as a member of the family."

Pat stood up now with her back against the wall, so to speak.

"Yes, it was very kind of you," said she. "And if I had been used to doing little things like those you wanted me to do, I should have done them willingly.

But I haven't. I've never had to brush my own clothes or to mend my own things. And I'm going to make Chris do the brushing, and the mending I shall send home to my mother to be done."

Here was the cloven hoof shown indeed. Mrs. Thorne was aghast, Carrie looked distinctly pleased at the fulfilment of her prophecies concerning the new wife and her "airs," while Millie gently whispered to Pat that she would do her mending for her; she would like to do it.

"I've never had such pretty things as yours to mend," she added, in the same amiable undertone. "It would be as great a pleasure to me to look over them and keep them all right for you as to wear them myself."

"You are a dear!" cried Pat impulsively.

And she flung her arms round Millie's neck and kissed her.

But old Mrs. Thorne and Carrie held themselves aloof, and although they were not openly unkind—they did not dare to be, indeed, anything but civil to the wife of Chris—yet they showed her again and again, in the course of the day, in the petty ways women can use, that they regarded the bride as an upstart and a trifler, unworthy of her good fortune in entering an honest and respectable British household untainted by any whims of vice or fashion.

That evening, when she was alone with her husband on his return from the office, Patricia locked the door and stood against it in an attitude of desperation.



"Chris," she said, "I'm awfully sorry to have to bother you so soon, but I can't stand your people very long. What are we going to do? Are we going to stay up here? Or are we going back to London?" And the softening of her face as she mentioned the city of her choice betrayed the feeling she had upon the matter. "Because if we're going to stay here, we must either go to an hotel or have a home of our own of some sort. I've been worried to death by your mother and Carrie—and I can't stand it much longer."

Chris heaved a deep sigh. He was looking tired and worried, and Patricia, inexperienced as she was, guessed that something had gone wrong at the office. Her father used to look like that, after a bad day in the City.

"What's the matter with you, Chris? Am I boring you with my silly little troubles when you've got worse ones of your own? I didn't mean to do that, dear."

She was so sweet, so amiable, her gentle, slow manner was so soothing, that a smile of tenderness passed over his face at once as he caressed her.

"Oh, no. Nothing's very wrong," he said. "I daresay much the same sort of thing has been happening to you as to me—the little apparently unimportant things said that are meant to wound, and things done that are meant to sting—just because I've done something they didn't expect me to do, and have brought home a lovely wife from outside instead of settling down with a humdrum woman of my people's choosing."

Pat nestled affectionately against him.

"Aren't they dreadful, Chris?" she moaned. "Why did you marry me, dear? You would have done much better to marry this Miss Bagshaw, though her nose does turn up and her teeth are all one over the other!"

Chris could not help laughing at this little bit of feminine description of a defeated rival.

"I've no doubt it would have been much better, Pat, better for me and for you, too, perhaps," he said rather sorrowfully. "Only—it couldn't be done, you see. For I saw you too soon."

"Chris, *you* don't want me to have domestic tastes and to know how to choose mutton, do you?" asked Pat with sudden fire.

"Well," he said sadly, "it's perhaps better that one of us should know something about mutton, since we shall both certainly have to eat a good deal of it. But if it comes to that, I'll learn all about it myself, and save you the trouble."

Pat laughed in delight.

"It's sweet of you to say that," she cooed with a winning air of mock gratitude; "but I will really learn some day, you know. Only I don't want all the domestic virtues flung in my face at once. I'd rather grow into them gradually—the more gradually the better. And in the meantime, Chris, what *are* we going to do?"

He sat down and leaned his head in his hand. It was quite true that his father had worried him that day as he had never done before, had found fault with him, had seemed to take a spiteful pleasure in show-

ing him how raw he was, how ignorant, how far as yet from being anything but a hindrance and an embarrassment at the office.

And although Chris knew that this was chiefly done out of malice, and he had done his fair share of the day's work, he could not help feeling irritated and humiliated by the proof thus forced upon his notice of the little use he was as yet, and of how entirely he was dependent upon his father for the present.

"I think," he said, after a little thought, "that what we had better do is take a house, a very small house here, furnished if possible, so as not to bind ourselves too closely, and to set up housekeeping on our own account without delay."

Pat was wild with delight.

"Oh, Chris, you are clever, and you are a dear," she said. "It was just what I was hoping you'd do! Indeed if I were to have a house of my own to look after, I don't think I should be a bit stupider than anybody else, not even than your sisters or your mother," she added with a spark of malice.

"Of course you wouldn't." He reflected a moment, and then said: "You don't mind if it's a small—a very small place—a cottage in fact?"

"The smaller the better, to begin with," said Pat promptly.

"Nor if it's a little way out of the town."

"The farther the better," retorted Patricia more promptly still.

Chris laughed.

"Well, we're of one mind, at least," said he as he kissed her and told her she was the sweetest as well as the most beautiful woman in the world, and that they would be as happy in their cottage as ever human beings could be.

"I'm sure I hope so," said Pat soberly.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY found the little house, but, of course, it was in no way like the little paradise of which they had both dreamed. Pat would have liked a red-tiled roof and a wooden porch with honeysuckles; Chris, more modest, would have had a modern up-to-date red brick cottage such as those which are temptingly—and delusively—advertised in the halfpenny papers as attainable for an infinitesimal sum, with all possible improvements in the way of sanitation and comfort.

What they got answered neither of these descriptions. It was simply a small old-fashioned, semi-detached villa, with steps up to the front door and a small garden behind. It was painted a shabby white, and amply provided with all the old-fashioned discomforts of bow-windows that let the draughts in, fireplaces that let the heat go up the chimney, and a kitchen fireplace of ancient and hopeless pattern.

On the whole, however, Chris was glad to see that Patricia was better pleased with it than he was.

She, however, was disappointingly frank about its chief advantage in her eyes.

"It's such a long way out, Chris," she said simply, when he found fault with some of the arrangements, "that they can't get at us easily."

He was rather shocked at this view of his mother

and sisters, but thought it wiser to let the remark pass without any but assenting comment

The fact was that he himself had been thoroughly disgusted by his family's treatment of Pat, who had behaved remarkably well at a very trying time, had preserved her amiability under the most decided attempts to snub her, and had nevertheless held her own with very proper dignity.

Altogether, Chris was as much delighted with his wife as he was displeased with his own people, and this fact naturally created a slight but increasing barrier beween his family and himself. Pat had put them in the wrong by her mild manners, and patience under what were scarcely less than impertinences; and although she always very rightly made a distinction between the girl who had been "nice" and the one who hadn't, it was inevitable that all three of the ladies of the villa should suffer together in the mind of Chris, and that he should make the most unfavourable comparisons of them with his better-bred and charming wife.

She took to housekeeping with the fervour of most young married women, but took to it with a difference. Pat, having been brought up in an atmosphere of gaiety, saw life merrily, and made light of mistakes and failures. When she tried to make a pudding, and it turned out as most first puddings do, she laughed till she cried, insisted upon its being served up as a warning to Chris not to expect too much from her, and treated the matter as the joke it was.

When the tradespeople and her one servant took advantage of her ignorance, she did not weep, she did not lose her temper, but expressed quite humbly and prettily her regret that she didn't know more.

The life they led seemed ideal to Chris, who came home each evening tired but radiant at the thought of the beautiful face waiting to welcome him, of the charm of the soothing manners, of the simple talk, of the womanly atmosphere that seemed to surround his darling.

Of course there was a little drop of bitterness in the cup. Patricia was happy and said so, but, honest and outspoken as usual, she did express often her wish that they lived nearer London, and that they could have their friends, her friends, down to see her.

"And I should like Lorna and Myra to see how well I manage," she remarked wistfully one day. "They always said, you know, that when I married the kitchen would be well provided with Dresden china cups and saucers and with *jardinières,* but that there would be no saucepans. And look!"

With this last word, uttered in a tone of defiant pride, Pat pointed to the array of kitchen utensils, of the use of half of which she was very doubtful, which hung round the walls and stood on the shelves of the kitchen and scullery.

"Well, you can ask my sisters to come and see you. They would be delighted to come," suggested Chris in a robust tone, for he felt diffident about making the suggestion.

And, as he had feared, it was received without enthusiasm.

"Oh, yes. I've had them here—all of them," she answered rather coolly. "They inspected everything, and found fault with nearly everything. But they were quite nice, quite kind—as far as they knew how," she added rather sharply.

Chris sighed.

"I do wish you could hit it off better with them," he said. "And that you would go out with them sometimes. It isn't good for you to stay here all day—you never get out except with me—and that's not often enough, not nearly often enough."

"I don't care for going out—about here. There's nothing to see," said Pat, with just a touch of sadness and regret in her tone which alarmed him. "But I'm quite happy indoors; really, I'm getting quite domestic, Chris, I am indeed."

"Ah, but I'm not going to have you settle down to a mere drudge, you my darling, my brilliant, beautiful wife," cried Chris with passion. "Look here! There's a flower-show the day after to-morrow. Let the girls take you to it, and you will have a chance of showing off your pretty frocks. Do, do, there's a good girl!"

But Pat shrank from the proposed pleasure. She was not at all disposed to look down upon her sisters-in-law, or upon anybody. And if she had been warmly received by them she would have met her husband's suggestions without demur. But as it was, Pat was

quite alive to the fact that, though the Thorne girls were as well-educated and well-mannered as the generality of their fellow-townswomen, they were by no means in the best "set" in the place; and she would have felt out of place with them if she had worn, as her husband suggested, dresses and hats which were decidedly smarter than any of those to be seen there.

Chris was vaguely conscious of these facts also, and was surprised to find how short a stay in London is required to open even a man's eyes to such small and, as he would have held, insignificant points.

Old Mr. Thorne was kept well informed as to the movements of his son and daughter-in-law; but though he paid them one visit and was civil and complimentary, he was far too shrewd to suppose that the narrow existence the brilliant and handsome Pat was leading would satisfy the spoilt child for long.

Patricia had been in her new home a month, and was beginning to be more than ever reminiscent in her talk, and to suggest sending to London for certain things she wanted for her house, when Mr. Thorne met his son one morning with an alert look on his hard old face which prepared the young man for some statement or suggestion of importance.

"Chris," said the old man, "I've got some important and paying business on hand, and I have a proposal to make to you. You don't seem inclined to settle down at Barnsfield, eh?"

The exclamation at the end of his sentence was short, sharp, decisive.

Chris reddened and stammered a little.

"I thought I had settled down," he ventured quietly.

His father shook his head.

"Not entirely. You have taken a furnished house, not an unfurnished one."

"Well, we had to go into something so quickly; we felt that we were in the way at your place."

"Yes, I know. My little madam didn't like being spoken to about anything. Well, that's your affair—and hers. What I was going to tell you is this. One of my clients, one of the Bagshaws, in fact, has just died in St. Petersburg, where he had a big factory. He's left a good deal of property, and his affairs are in rather a tangled state. Some one has to go out there and put things straight, and we reckon it will be a three months' business at least."

Chris, who now began to guess what was coming, trembled. He felt vaguely that this was his doom, that his happiness was threatened, that happiness which was so much greater than he had expected or deserved, and that he was hugging to his heart. Deeply as he loved his wife, surprised and delighted as he was at the way in which she had settled down in her small house in an outskirt of a drab provincial town, he did not deceive himself into believing that she would be contented to pass her life there, or that she would become such a housewife as his mother.

He did not wish this, indeed. But the fact that Patricia was lovely and attractive, while making him anxious for her to shine as nature meant her to do,

made it particularly necessary that she should have a lover and protector in her husband.

Old Mr. Thorne, after a pause, went on:—

"Now, the question is, who is to go? I could go, of course. But I'm rather old for that sort of thing, and not perhaps so quick as a younger man in picking up what little of the language it is desirable to know. Besides, I know scarcely any French, and French is even more necessary than Russian. On the whole, then, it would be better, I think, if you were to go. What do you think about it?"

Chris hesitated.

"Could I take Patricia?" he asked at last.

Mr. Thorne shook his head decidedly.

"Certainly not. You want all your wits for what you've got to do, if you go, and you don't want to be bothered looking after a petticoat. No. If you do go, it must be alone."

"I'd rather not, if you can manage otherwise," said Chris with decision.

A stubborn look appeared on the old man's face. His son saw at once that he had made up his mind, and knew how the contest between them would end.

"As it's a matter of importance," said the old man, in a very quiet and deliberate tone which his son knew and understood, "I am willing to meet you halfway —more than halfway. If you will go to Russia for me, see this business through—and it may take longer than I've said—six months, perhaps, or even more—

but if you do this for me and do it well, as I know you could, I will go as far as this: I will let you off the arrangement I had at first proposed: I will set you up in business in town—London—put you in partnership, or something of that sort, so that you and your wife can be nearer the centre of things, as I suppose you both wish to be."

Chris felt sick at heart and almost faint with a vague terror. Although he was far from imagining that his father had deliberately set a trap for him and Patricia, he yet foresaw only too plainly some of the inevitable results of such a course as was thus suggested. He knew that Patricia would find six months of life alone in her dreary little house in a provincial suburb insupportable, and indeed he scarcely thought he could expect her to put up with it.

He could appeal to her; he could lay everything before her. And he would do this before he decided.

"May I consult my wife before I say yes or no?" he asked in the same low voice that his father had used, a sign with the stolid Yorkshiremen of some strong inward emotion.

"Oh, yes, certainly you may."

Chris went to the little villa that evening with a heavy heart. He prepared the sentences in which he should make known his father's plan to her. But none would do, and at last, of course, he blurted out his proposal in the crudest and most awkward fashion.

As he had expected, nay, as he had dreaded, Patricia heard it with delight. Her beautiful face beamed

with joy, and she flung her arms round his neck with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Chris, Chris, London! London again! Dear, dirty, darling, damp, dreary, delightful, delicious old London!" cried she, as, panting and trembling, she looked into his face with eyes that sparkled more than they had done since her exile in the north country began. "Oh, don't, don't look so grave! I know you're not as glad as I am, but oh, dear, I can't help it! The thought of it—and of seeing them all again—and of being in the swim of things again—oh, Chris, it makes me crazy, crazy!"

He had to wait a little before he could steady his own voice to reply to her. Caressing her beautiful head, with its golden-brown hair, he said, in as gentle a voice as he could:—

"Well, dear, I thought you'd be pleased. But have you considered—I shall have to be away a long time—three months certainly, more likely six—perhaps more."

Her face fell a little, and she nestled against him.

"Couldn't you take me with you, then?"

"No, that's quite impossible."

She sighed.

"Well, it will be dreadful not to see you for all that long time, which will seem even longer, much longer without you, you dearest old dear. But then I shall have a lot to do preparing the home we're to live in, shan't I?"

He suddenly pushed her away from him with a frown.



"Do you want to go to London without me then?" he asked sharply. "Can't you wait till I come? I thought," he added more gently, as he saw a frightened look appear on her face, "that we should have worked together to get our new home, our own home together, just as we did before. Only it will be nicer, because we shall have to get furniture, too. Oh, Pat, can't you wait for me?"

She sobbed.

"And—and what am I to do? Where am I to go? While you're away?" she asked dismally.

He snatched her to him with a sudden gesture as if a giant hand had appeared, hovering over them, threatening to take her away from him.

"No, no, no," he said passionately. "I won't go. I can't go. I'll tell my father he must give it up."

But a look of wild alarm appeared on Patricia's face at these words.

"You must go, Chris," she said. "Look here. We can't go on living here always, can we? And here's the chance of getting away. If your father, who's so hard-headed and shrewd, has made up his mind that you are to go, he will treat you handsomely. You know that it is like him to make up his mind strongly, and to treat you well if you fall in with his wishes. So you must go, and there's an end of it."

"But you? How can I leave you?"

"Oh, we must make up our minds to it. I'll go on staying here, only you mustn't mind—you really mustn't—Chris, if I have one of my sisters to see me!



Come, I've put up with your sisters, haven't I? And I haven't asked you to have Lorna or Myra here while you were with me, have I?"

Here was a dilemma indeed. Chris had congratulated himself too soon upon the fact that his wife had not asked permission to invite one of those objectionable sisters. But how was he to refuse permission for them to come when she was left by herself? Not only would it seem cruel, but he had very strong doubts whether she would respect such a prohibition, if he were to make it.

On the other hand, he felt only too surely that the influence of the fast married women would be considerably more dangerous to Patricia now that she was herself married, than it was in the old days, when there was the barrier of her girlhood between her and them.

Before he could make up his mind what to answer, Patricia said:—

"Well, look here, Chris, I don't want to have them here if you would rather not. Let me go and see Mamma, and stay at home for a little while—and——"

Chris stood up, straight and angry.

This was worse than the other suggestion. She would get back among the old set, would be made love to, in earnest this time, by Giles Wendover and the rest, and would slip back into the old life, the old ways, and the old ideas, and would be, if not lost to him, yet changed to him for ever when he came back.

The conflict within him was terrible. Patricia



guessed a little of the torture he was enduring but she was far from guessing all.

Her voice, gentle, persuasive, coaxing, broke the silence.

"I'll do just whichever you like, Chris. But you'll let me do one or the other, won't you?"

To her horror, he snatched her in his arms, strained her to him, kissed her again and again, leaving white marks on her cheeks where the pressure of his lips had driven the blood away from them, and when he let her go, she saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"It will never be the same again, Pat, never the same again," he said brokenly, turning away from her, and trembling like a leaf.

Trembling too, and gentle, and submissive, and sweet, Pat put her white hand caressingly in his.

"Why shouldn't it, dear? Why shouldn't it? I'll be so good," said she.

He felt that he was a brute to doubt her; and yet he knew that it was not fair to himself to say that he did doubt her. What he did dread and doubt was the strong influence which would be brought to bear upon her, and the insensible effect it would have on her amiable, easy-going nature.

"You must keep true to me, Pat, or I shall go mad," he said hoarsely, turning upon her so suddenly that she uttered an exclamation and drew back almost frightened.

"Chris, O Chris! it's wicked to say that to me! I love you with all my heart."

So they left it, Chris not laying any commands upon her, but leaving it to her faith and loyalty to do her utmost to obey his wishes.

When he appeared at the office the next morning, his father knew, at the first glance, that he was going to Russia.

And the old man smiled to himself with malicious satisfaction when he was left alone.



CHAPTER IX

VERY little time was given to Chris to prepare for his journey to Russia. Perhaps his father feared that his purpose would break down if he had too much leisure to think of the consequences of leaving his wife alone for so long.

However that might be, it is certain that the time seemed very short before the day on which good-bye had to be said. Pat looked not only sad but frightened when the moment came for giving her husband the last kiss. He had been so terribly depressed for some days, that she had, with her usual amiability, worked hard to keep up his spirits, had assured him that the time would fly quickly if he had to work hard, had made light of the desolate prospect before herself, and had laid more stress, than was quite justified by the facts, on the kindness of his people to her in her loneliness.

Now that the final parting had come, however, there fell upon the poor young wife a feeling of utter desolation, and she clung to Chris, saying hoarsely:—

"Oh, Chris, what shall I do? What will become of me? Do, do try hard to get the work done quickly, and to come back before Christmas. I couldn't spend Christmas alone, and I couldn't spend it with your people. I must have you, you, you!"

He it was who had to be brave now, and he laughed,

and affected to believe that the work he had to do would all be completed long before the winter came.

Then came the last moment, the final wrench, and Pat, trembling, flushed, scarcely knowing what she was doing, was left standing on the station platform, watching the train as it moved out of the station, and feeling as if she had been suddenly torn out of happiness and safety and even life itself.

She was alone, that was one comfort. She was conscious, even at that awful moment, of a feeling of thankfulness that Chris had insisted that his wife alone should see him off at the station, and that his farewells to his family should be said on the previous evening.

However, it was not to be supposed that such a slight as this was in their eyes should be allowed to pass unavenged. And when Patricia, in pursuance of her promise to her husband, went to tea with them that evening, she was made to feel that she had put up a barrier between Chris and them which they were anxious to make still higher against herself.

Of course, as before, Millie did not join her mother and sisters in their veiled attacks, but Patricia was too miserable at that time to make distinctions, as she usually did. They were all heartless and unkind together, it seemed to her, and she went back to her villa that night fully resolved not to go near the Thornes again until the return of her husband.

And then London, London, dear old London! Oh, there was joy in the thought.

To comfort herself, Pat sat down at her writing table and wrote a very long and detailed letter to Myra, whom she liked better than her more artificial sister, Lorna, telling her of the departure of her husband for Russia, of the promise his father had made to set him up in business in London on his return, and of the sense of misery and depression which she could not help feeling now he was gone.

She added, however, that her solitude would not last long, and that, as soon as Chris returned to England, which would be in a few weeks, they would be in town at once, buying furniture for the house they meant to take there.

This was the first really good, long, confidential letter that Pat had written home since her marriage. Conscious, as she could not help being, of the wide differences between her own old home and that of her husband, she had been averse to writing long letters "home," as she still called it, and indeed, while Chris was with her, she had had but little sense of loneliness even when he was at the office.

Even if she had wanted to write long letters to her sisters, too, the feeling that he would not like it, and that he would perhaps resent not seeing the answers, had acted as a further restraint upon her inclination for correspondence.

Now, however, that she was quite alone, the want of a confidante overpowered all other feelings, and knowing that if Myra were to write her a long answer, she could read it and re-read it without fear of

its being seen and disapproved of, Pat let herself go, and scribbled four full sheets.

This was October, and whatever inclination Pat might have felt for long walks by herself was now checked by the keenness of the cold winds and the occasional snow-showers, which, in that bleak country, already heralded the cold season.

So when Myra's answer came, and proved to be quite as long and quite as full as her own letter, Pat was delighted to curl herself up in front of the fire in her tiny drawing-room, and to read and to cry over it to her heart's content.

Myra had been much offended, it turned out, by the scrappy and insufficient letters that she had received from her sister since her marriage. Myra was, although by no means refined or discreet, a good-natured and unaffected little woman, and she was fond of her younger sister and proud of her beauty, being in that respect unlike Lorna, who was jealous of Patricia's superior personal attractions.

Mrs. Aylwin was delighted at the prospect of having her sister near her again, and she asked fifty questions as to the neighbourhood the young couple would choose, and wanted to know whether she should begin to look out for them herself at once.

And, of course, she wound up by begging Patricia to leave the villa, and to come down and stay with her at her big house in Bayswater.

She wound up with this postscript:—

"You talk about buying furniture. But haven't



you furnished already? Do you mean to sell what you have and buy new things for London?"

Patricia reddened, alone as she was, when she came to this line.

What would Myra say if she were to see the horrible, shabby furniture of the house she lived in? Myra, who had such beautiful things, and who had always set her heart on Patricia's marrying splendidly?

When Patricia had her husband with her, she had no time for reflections of this frivolous and discontented kind. But now that she was solitary, surrounded too by unsympathetic elements, she did give a few sighs over the difference between the future which had been painted for her and that with which she had provided herself.

Poor Chris had been so very low-spirited about his prospects, under the influence of his grief at parting from his bride, that he had perhaps infected her with a more sombre view of the future than the facts of his position justified. For Chris suspected, what was indeed the case, that his father was richer than he allowed it to be supposed, and was able, if he should choose, to provide, not only for his daughters but for his son, in a handsome manner.

Patricia gave a cautious reply to her sister's letter, ignored the question about the furniture and thanked her for her invitation, but thought that, in view of the hopes she had of her husband's speedy return, she had better stay where she was, so that they could set out on their house-hunting expeditions together.

And then there came a bombshell into the poor young wife's hopes and plans. Chris wrote a despairing letter, saying that he discovered fresh work every day, that the affairs he had to settle were in a far more involved state than he had supposed, and that he should think himself lucky if he were able to be back in England before the new year.

This was terrible. They were only in the middle of October, and Pat saw that it would be nearly three months before she could hope to see her husband again.

What should she do?

Already she found the confinement to which her listless and unsettled state of mind conduced, preying upon her health and her spirits; and, on receiving this bad news, she determined, in spite of the disappointment which might be in store for her, to go to the Thornes' house and to try to have a talk with the only member of the family whom she liked.

She was lucky in finding Millie at home and alone, and she poured out her heart to her, crying over her husband's letter, and begging her to ask her father whether he could not send some one to Russia to help Chris with his work.

"It's such a dreadfully long time for me to be alone, isn't it?" she said.

Millie cried too, like the good-natured girl she was, but shook her head at the suggestion of speaking to her father.

"Don't you know how useless it would be?" she asked quickly. "He isn't like the men you're used



to down in the south, who can be coaxed, as your father and brothers can. When he has once made up his mind nobody can move him. Even you, with all your beauty, can do nothing. And as for all of us, we can do less than nothing. Father thinks no more of us and our opinions and wishes than if we were so many flies."

Pat was still quietly crying.

"I don't know what I shall do," she said. "I'm beginning to feel so lonely, and then when I get my sister's letters, asking me to go and stay with her, and telling me of all the jolly times they're having, why, it does seem hard, very hard!"

"Chris shouldn't have left you like that," said Millie indignantly.

"Oh, you mustn't blame him. It was my fault," said Pat quickly. "You see, your father promised to let us settle in London if Chris would do this, and I was so anxious to get there that I said I could stand anything. But I didn't think it would last so long."

Millie, who knew from private information that the stay of Chris in Russia was likely to be even longer than Patricia thought, could say very little to comfort her.

"Couldn't you have one of your sisters—or your mother—to stay with you?" she suggested.

Patricia shook her head.

"I don't think I should like them to see me in that horrid little furnished house," she said. Then she added hastily, seeing the look of amazement on Millie's

face: "Of course I know it's not a bad house, and it seemed all right when Chris was there; but—it isn't like my sister's homes, or my mother's."

She gave a long sigh.

"Or ours, of course," said Millie, not disagreeably, but yet with a certain implication that it was a pity Patricia had made such an inappropriate choice of a husband.

The young wife reddened.

"I didn't mean that," she said.

Millie put a gentle hand on her sister-in-law's arm.

"And I didn't mean to hurt you," she said. "But still I do think, and indeed there's nothing else to be thought—that Chris made a mistake in marrying a girl used to such a different sort of life as yours, and then in expecting her to wait contentedly, as you have to wait, for him to come back to you."

Patricia, however, had a certain robust common sense, and this came to her rescue.

"What is the use," she said, "of worrying oneself about that now? If it was a mistake, it's too late to let oneself say so. We must make the best of it. And," she added with a sudden wistful drop into a wholly feminine gentleness and tenderness, "I shouldn't be able even to admit the possibility of its having been a mistake if only Chris were here!"

"You are a darling, Patricia!" said Millie, suddenly kissing her, "and I don't wonder Chris found you irresistible after us! You're not like the girls up here, or ourselves, or any others I ever saw! I think

you must be unique! For you're beautiful without being vain, and you've got so much common sense, you're so out-spoken, and yet you're affectionate as well."

Patricia laughed at this unexpected eulogy, but found comfort in her sister-in-law's sympathy.

However, when Mrs. Thorne and Carrie, who had been out for a walk, returned to find these two enjoying a confidential chat, their suspicions were aroused directly, and they expressed, not in words, but in tones and looks, their disapproval of these confidences which the family in general were not allowed to share.

When Patricia recognised the fact that her last resource was thus cut off, and when Mrs. Thorne demurred at allowing Millie to acept an invitation to stay with her for a day or two, Patricia suddenly rose up with an air of desperation.

"Oh, well, then," she said quietly, "I suppose if Millie mustn't come and see me, I must get one of my own sisters to come."

Mrs. Thorne, who was so much under the influence of her masterful husband that she dared not indulge in any special show of kindliness to Patricia, as in some way under the ban of his displeasure, looked somewhat confused and shamefaced at these words.

"If you would ask both the girls to come it might be managed," she said. "But Millie is such a goose that I'm afraid she wouldn't be of much use to you, and you would spoil each other, I think."

"Spoil each other!" echoed Patricia in surprise.

"Yes," said Carrie, carrying on the fight. "Millie is too fond of flattering people, and it won't do for you to be spoilt by flattery while your husband's away."

This rude and unkind speech was the last straw to Patricia's powers of endurance. She refused their invitation to stay to tea, and going straight back to her little wretched house, which had begun by this time to be hateful in her eyes, she wrote to Myra and told her she was miserable, and that, if Myra would spend a week at Scarborough, she would join her there.

Patricia, feeling horribly guilty when she had dispatched the letter, waited, nevertheless, eagerly for the answer. She expected to receive it by return of post, if not, indeed, by telegraph, for Myra was an impulsive person, used to doing things in a hurry.

Already the thought of the coming change had brightened Pat's eyes and brought back to her cheeks a little of the colour which, during the past fortnight, had begun to leave them. Already she had begun to shut herself up in the room with her trunks, to go over her wardrobe and decide what she should and what she should not take to Scarborough.

Not for a moment did she doubt that Myra, always ready for a change and eager for novelty and excitement, would jump at the notion of a week in one of the Scarborough hotels with her. True, it was out of the season, but Myra knew how to make herself comfortable anywhere, and she would certainly find out the best hotel, and the best rooms in it, and take care to be served in the best possible way.

Money being no object with the prosperous solicitor's wife, she always had the best of everything, and Patricia, used to the chop and steak *régime* upon which she had had to fall back in her loneliness, was just beginning to think how very pleasant a change back to the best of everything would be.

To her dismay, she got no telegram, and the post that should have brought her the expected letter brought none.

Patricia wept for dismay. What had happened? Was Myra offended? Had she suddenly turned on her sister, and made up her mind, since she had been neglected in the early days of Pat's marriage, to show her no mercy now?

Poor Patricia waited for the next post, and then, almost broken-hearted, went out for a long, solitary walk, to save herself from going mad with distress and disappointment.

She went right outside the bare Yorkshire town, and climbed up to the top of one of the hills that lay to the north of it. The air was cold, the wind was searching; but she did not care. The stinging of the sleet on her face was welcome, for it seemed to act as a counter-irritant to the state of her mind. She felt utterly solitary, abandoned and alone. And although she knew that this was not actually the case, since she had her husband's letters even at that moment tucked inside the bodice of her dress to comfort if they did not cheer her, it was not unnatural that the spoilt child should look upon herself as hardly dealt



with, and that she should feel that the burden laid upon her was greater than she could bear.

She got home at a little before six, and was surprised to see, before she reached the house, that there were lights in the dining-room.

A ray of hope shot into her heart. Had Myra come? Had she left the letter unanswered because she meant to spring a joyous surprise upon her sister?

Pat ran up the long flight of steps that led to the front door of the old-fashioned house, and knocked.

There was a little delay in answering, and then she heard a sound in the little hall which was not that of the brawny Yorkshire maid's heavy feet. The door was opened, and Pat laughing and crying, fell into Myra's arms.

The greetings of the sisters were characteristic.

"Myra! Oh, Myra! I'm so glad! You might have wired!" cried Pat.

Myra, after the first kiss, drew back from her sister and stared at her out of her great, green, round eyes.

"Good gracious, child, what a scarecrow you look! And what a beast of a house!" cried she in genuine horror.

CHAPTER X

PATRICIA sighed humbly.

"Am I?" she said. "Well, I shall be all right now you're come. As for the house, it's only a make-shift, you know, till we can get a place of our own. It has the one advantage," she added, in a burst of rash candour, "of being two miles away from the Thornes."

Myra stared at her with intelligence.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" she said, closing her mouth with a snap. "I thought as much!"

"Oh, I don't mean to say that they're anything but all right, and—and all that," said Patricia quickly, as she led her sister into the dining-room and snatched up admiringly a sable cape which Myra had thrown off, and which she recognised as a new purchase. "What a sweet cape, Myra! Where did you buy it?"

"Paris," said Myra laconically. "Ah! You look as if a dose of Paris would do *you* good!"

Pat shook her head feebly.

"I've given up those vanities," she said, trying to speak lightly.

But, to her dismay, Myra, after taking her by the shoulders and staring again for some seconds intently into her face, suddenly burst into hysterical sobbing.

"Pat," said she, "this marriage has been a ghastly, awful, shocking mistake."

"No, no," protested Patricia angrily, "I won't have a word said against Chris. I was as happy as the day was long until he had to go away, and so I shall be when he comes back again. Of course I'm bound to feel the loss of him when he's as far away as Russia."

But Myra sobbed on, making herself hideously ugly, with odd little furrows of yellow where the tears had run down in lines over the white powder with which her cheeks were plastered.

"I don't care what you say," she persisted between her sobs, "but I know that a man who leaves his wife—and such a handsome, lovely wife as you, Pat, all alone in a beast of a house, in an uncivilised part of the country like this, and expects her to sit down and patiently wait for him, deserves to be flogged!"

"Don't, Myra, it hurts," whispered Pat. "His people aren't nice, I admit. But Chris is a dear. Only we didn't know how long I should have to wait, and—Oh, I am glad you've come, dear! When are we going on to Scarborough?"

"Oh, bother Scarborough!" replied Myra impatiently. "How can we go there at this time of year? It would be as bad as this—nearly. No, I'm going to take you home, Pat, ho-o-o-o-ome!"

And she drew out the delightful word to an interminable length as she squeezed her sister's arms to her sides and looked up in her face with anxious tenderness.

Pat shook her head, but feebly.

"I can't go," she said. "But, if you won't take me

to Scarborough, you must stay with me a day or two here."

"In this town, yes. But not in this house," retorted Myra with promptitude. "You must come with me to the Midland, where I've put up."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!"

"Why not? Wouldn't it be a treat for you to be surrounded with decent things again?"

And Mrs. Aylwin threw a contemptuous glance around her at the old mahogany chairs and the ugly inharmonious carpet and curtains.

"Chris—his people would think it odd, dreadful."

"Not half so dreadful, I fancy, as I should think them," retorted Myra sharply.

Pat said nothing to this. Her sister's curiosity was, however, well roused by this time.

"What are they like, his people?" she said. "He's all right himself. Aren't they?"

Patricia hesitated.

"I'm afraid," she said at last, "that, if you expected them to be like Chris, you'd be disappointed. You see he has been at Oxford, and has moved about, and knows London and all that, while his people seem never to have moved out of their little groove. In fact, they don't seem as if they could."

"I must go to see them," said Myra.

But Patricia looked at her in dismay.

"Oh, no, don't, please," said she. "You wouldn't take to each other a bit, I'm sure. They look on me as slangy."

Myra laughed.

"I suppose you think I should shock them."

"I'm sure you would. But not half so much they'd shock you."

"Oh, well," said Myra, "you've got somebody look after you now, and to save you from these count bumpkins. Come now, come with me, there's a de and I'll give you a good dinner at the hotel, and you feel better."

"I'll come to dine with you, but I must come ba here afterwards. Be content with that, there's dear."

"Oh, well," said Myra, "that's the thin end of t wedge, anyhow."

Patricia looked rather disconcerted for a mome This was exactly what she had been thinking herse and the thought frightened her a little. But her sis bustled her off upstairs to dress, superintended th operation in person, choosing the frock Pat wou wear, the jewels too, and finally carrying her off in fly to the hotel, where Pat, as she had expected, h what they called "a good time."

Under the influence of the change in her surroun ings, she became again, if not quite the happy, ir sponsible Pat of the old days at home, yet as unli as possible to the scared, watchful, timid creature s had lately been when in the company of the Thor family.

She insisted on returning home after dinner, b it was arranged that Myra should come and spe

[redacted] afternoon with her on the following day, and [redacted]at again they should wind up with dinner at the [redacted]otel.

Now, although Barnsfield was a town of some [redacted]undred thousand inhabitants, and, therefore, pre-[redacted]umably free from some of the inconveniences of a [redacted]untry village, the usual tenor of life there was so [redacted]ll, so commonplace, that the arrival of any per-[redacted]n who was conspicuously well or even showily dressed, [redacted]s an event which caused some stir, or at least some [redacted]ssip.

When, therefore, to the arrival of Mrs. Aylwin with [redacted]r smart French maid, her two Japanese spaniels, and [redacted]r handsome costumes and showy jewelry, there was [redacted]lded the excitement of her visit to the beautiful and [redacted]erefore much talked about Mrs. Christopher Thorne, [redacted]d the second excitement of young Mrs. Thorne's [redacted]turn visit to her at the hotel, these events were [redacted]ough to set people talking, and the news reached [redacted]e Thorne family on the morning after Myra's ar-[redacted]val.

There arose then in the family a strong feeling that [redacted]ey had made a mistake in treating Patricia as they [redacted]d done, and both Carrie and Millie looked dis-[redacted]ayed. It was all the fault, indeed, of their mother, [redacted]at they had not seen the folly of their conduct.

Here was an opportunity of meeting smart people [redacted]om London, missed through their neglect of Patricia. [redacted]arrie, in particular, who was more intelligent than [redacted]e other two, smarted continually under the sense

that they were "out of it," compared to people like the family from which Patricia had come.

Although she felt that they were probably now too late, she insisted that she and Millie should call upon Patricia that afternoon, on the chance of meeting Mrs. Aylwin, and of making a good impression on her, and perhaps getting an invitation to her town house.

So they dressed very carefully, putting on their best frocks and hoping that Patricia would not notice the fact, and started for their brother's furnished villa.

They asked for Patricia, and were informed by the servant, a great country girl who was evidently much impressed by her mistress's visitors, that there were two gentlemen and a lady in the drawing-room.

Carrie was more than ever pleased that she had had the forethought to dress carefully, but Millie looked somewhat scandalised.

"Gentlemen! What would Chris say?" she whispered to her sister as they went in.

And in the drawing-room they found the merriest party in the world. Myra Aylwin, a scandalising object to the Barnsfield girls, with her face like a white mask, her fingers, ears and breast sparkling with diamonds and emeralds, a jangling, dangling chain round her neck and hanging to her knees, loaded with gold purses, pencil-cases, and trifles of various sorts, an enormous black hat piled up high with shaded ostrich feathers on her head, and a long snake-like length of dark green silk winding about her feet and



glittering like a mermaid's tail in the gaslight, sat on the little sofa, leaning her head upon her hand and playing with her two little dogs.

A very young man, well dressed but not good-looking, was sitting on a hard footstool at her feet, offering biscuits to the pampered little animals.

While at the other end of the room near a little table, Patricia, looking brighter and handsomer than they had ever yet seen her, and dressed in a costume of black lace and old rose velvet which they had not seen before, was talking in a low voice to a second young man, about four and twenty years of age, with a fair moustache and blue eyes, who was rather heavy-looking, but just sufficiently like Patricia for the girls to know at once that he must be one of her two brothers.

The entrance of the two girls disturbed everybody, and the young men, though they did not, of course, openly show their annoyance at the intrusion, became very quiet and solemn, and exchanged stealthy looks of resentment.

Patricia introduced the heavy young man as "my brother Jim," and the younger man as Lord William Buckland. Mrs. Aylwin shook hands languidly with Carrie and Millie, and scarcely attempted to conceal her displeasure with them for their neglect of her sister. Indeed she, with characteristic frankness, took an early opportunity of reproaching them with their conduct.

"You don't come very often to see my sister, I understand?" she asked sharply, addressing Carrie in her

unpleasant and rather coarse voice. "She tells me she has not seen either of you for some days."

Millie looked ashamed and almost tearful, but Carrie answered with a heightened colour:—

"I'm afraid Patricia doesn't care much for our society. We lead a very quiet life, very quiet indeed."

"And my poor sister has had to lead one quieter still," retorted Mrs. Aylwin. "Bill, don't tease the animals. They'd be quite good if only you would leave them alone."

Thus admonished, Lord William caressed his knees and made faces at the dogs instead of pulling their tails, and Jim Goldsmith threw at him another stealthy look.

Patricia poured out some tea for her sisters-in-law, and tried hard to keep up some sort of conversation with them. But all her attempts to drag the two young men into the talk failed. Both resented so strongly what they had heard from Mrs. Aylwin of the treatment meted out to the beauty, Patricia, that they declined to be more than barely courteous to these two dreadful girls who had taken sides with her tormentors.

When the girls got back to their mother, they were brimming over with the scandalous delights they had witnessed, with the free and easy atmosphere which Patricia's sister had brought into the place, and with the marvels of her appearance.

"She was painted an inch thick, mother, and her hair was dyed a colour unlike any you ever saw before, a sort of copper colour that looked magenta in the



des. And her dress—I never saw anything like it
: of a comic opera. Her hat was piled up with long
ıded green feathers, and her dress was green, too,
l she was glittering all over with jewels like a fairy
ɔen in a pantomime."

"And one of the men there was a lord, and she
led him Bill," said Millie, whom this circumstance
l impressed very much.

Mrs. Thorne was aghast at these details.

"Men! There were men there!" exclaimed she.

"Oh, one of them was her brother. I didn't like
n, and I could see he didn't like us," said Millie.

"Nonsense," said her sister sharply. "How could
u tell that?"

"I saw him look at the other one," said Millie
ietly, "and—mother—I believe they were angry,
of them, because we haven't looked after Patricia
tter. And oh, mother, you know we haven't."

There was a moment's silence. Even Mrs. Thorne
s conscious that her husband's wishes had been but
) faithfully followed, and she was beginning to see,
:e her daughters, the foolishness as well as the un-
ıdness of their behaviour. Patricia had been so
ɔdest, and so anxious to please, so afraid of appear-
ʒ to boast of the superior position of her own people,
d of their different way of life, that the Thornes
d gathered but a very imperfect idea of the family
cumstances, and had known nothing of the solid
cuniary position of at least one of the Goldsmith
ughters.

"If we'd only played our cards better," cried Carrie, in a sudden burst of candour, "we should have been able to go up to London whenever we liked. Instead of that, when Patricia goes, we shall have no hold on her at all."

Mrs. Thorne said "Hush," and looked alarmed. But she, too, saw that her hard-headed old husband had on this occasion overreached himself, and that by taking a totally different line of conduct, and receiving Patricia with open arms, instead of the handsome sister-in-law's becoming a burden and an extravagance, she would have opened for the two girls the golden gate of London, with perhaps a good marriage for each of them.

Even old Christopher Thorne half agreed with his wife that night when she ventured timidly to make this suggestion to him. For jewels and furs and expensive dogs and luxuries of that sort are tangible things; and the stay at an expensive hotel where Mrs. Aylwin had a private suite of rooms was another. The old Yorkshireman began to feel not indeed compunction for his deliberate cruelty, but regret at his own mistake; and although he would not own it, he saw that he had acted like a fool in not taking advantage of the opportunity to push his own wares in a new and good market.

He knew, however, that it was too late to go back, and so it proved.

Patricia, attired in the black lace and rose-velvet gown which she had not dared wear in the presence



of her sisters-in-law, but which they resented not having seen before, was driven to the hotel again, and she and Myra and the two young men dined merrily there, and Patricia, her old self again, was the liveliest of the party, none the less that certain qualms possessed her as to what Chris would say when he heard of it.

Carrie and Millie, indeed, had both written to their brother already, telling him in different ways, about this sudden invasion of the town by the hordes of Patricia's old friends and relations.

But it would be some days before they could get any answer to their letters, and in the meantime events were following fast on one another's heels at Barnsfield.

Patricia, having begun by dining twice at the hotel with her sister, and having Myra, and Jim and Lord William and the dogs twice to her house in return, was losing some of her depression, and feeling within her, not only the natural reaction from the terrible life of loneliness which she had been leading, but a certain feeling of soreness that Chris should have been ready to leave her to this solitude, rather than let her join her old friends again.

This feeling, it is scarcely necessary to say, was fanned most scrupulously by her sister and her train, who all combined in making out that Patricia was a martyr to a brutal husband.

And although Pat herself fought angrily against this decision, and would not allow a word of reproach

to be uttered against Chris, she did enjoy with a full heart the change from misery to brightness.

On the third day of Myra's visit to Barnsfield, Patricia's servant came to her with a tear-stained face, saying that her mother was very ill, and begging for permission to go back to her for a week, if it could be managed "now your sister is here, ma'am," as the kind-hearted girl was careful to add.

When Myra arrived that afternoon, therefore, Patricia told her of this dilemma, and in reply Myra only said:—

"How have you got the house? And who's your landlord?"

Hesitating, trembling, Patricia told her. And Myra, bouncing off the sofa in the erratic way characteristic of her, snatched up her sable cape, and telling them not to come out with her, she could find her way herself, she disappeared.

Patricia looked scared and guilty, guessing what was going to happen.

Three quarters of an hour later Myra rushed back again, flung down upon the table a receipt in full for the rent of the house up to the end of the term for which it had been taken, and crying: "There! Now she's free, and she shall come back to town with us, and leave this nasty beastly town for good!" she flung her arms round Patricia's waist, and laughed for joy.

"What have you done?" asked Patricia, trembling and hoarse.

"What have I done? Why, my dear, the only thing



we could do. Your servant is going away; you couldn't stay in the house all by yourself. I've given it up for you, told the man to send round for the keys to-night. So now you'd better run upstairs and pack up your things, for when you leave this house for dinner to-night you will never come back to it."

"What will——"

She was not allowed to finish her sentence. The two young men were cheering Mrs. Aylwin for her prompt action, and Jim declared that she had done the only thing possible, and that he certainly should never have dreamt of going back to town without taking his sister.

Patricia didn't cry, but she was very white and silent and demure that evening, when, yielding to the clamorous insistence of the party, she did indeed take her trunks away with her to the hotel, with the knowledge that one leaf in her short married life was turned for ever.

CHAPTER XI

PATRICIA did not forget, before leaving the little furnished house, to make arrangements for the forwarding of her letters.

Christopher wrote to her three times a week, and she knew that one of his letters was due on the morning after she left the house.

When she received it, she found that it contained news which went some way towards justifying her for the step she had already taken in yielding to the persuasions of Myra.

For her husband told her, in words full of distress and disappointment, that he was now sure he could not be back in England before February at the earliest, that he found more to do every day, and that he had to apply himself very hard to the task before him, working incessantly, not only at the business which occupied him, but at the Russian language, which he had found it advisable to study.

In this dilemma, he professed himself at a loss on her account. He felt that he could not leave her alone in the villa for the winter, and he begged her to write to him fully with her own suggestions on the subject.

Would she stay with his people? He was sure, he said, that any little soreness there might have been over his marriage must have passed long ago, and that

his parents and sisters would be as kind as possible to her in her desolate position.

His letter was kind and tender, as usual, and Patricia kissed it lovingly before puting it, where she always carried his letters, inside her bodice, to be near her heart.

But she felt a distinct sense of relief at the step she had taken, after the first sensation of disappointment at his continued absence.

As for that news, she had expected it, and it was the sense of the long, dreary time that lay before her which had done more than anything else to make her miserable. She could have borne a few weeks of loneliness, but the vague knowledge that the weeks would surely grow into months had been too much for her fortitude.

She did not tell Myra all that Chris had written, but only that he was afraid he would not be in England before the end of the year, and that he wanted her to suggest what she should do, and asked whether she would go to his people.

Myra made a grimace expressive of horror at the notion.

"Of course," she said then with a laugh, "you can go to them if you like, Pat; and take lessons from the old lady in economical housekeeping."

Patricia did not condescend to answer this frivolous remark.

"I must go to them," she said, "and tell them where I shall be for the winter."

"And where's that?"

Pat hesitated.

"I had better go to Mamma," she said. "It's very good of you to want to have me, but I think Chris would rather I went back home."

Myra looked rather offended.

"Oh, well, you must do as you like, of course. And my house is within five minutes' walk of Mamma's; but I should have liked to have you, and we would have had great fun. We could have done ever so much more now you're married, too."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Patricia, knowing that this was just what Christopher would have wished her to avoid.

So she started for the Thornes' house, to say good-bye to Christopher's relations, feeling in much better spirits than she usually did when she had to meet them.

She found all the ladies at home, in a very subdued mood. They were all by this time strongly imbued with the sense of their own folly in treating her badly, and old Mr. Thorne had hinted to them that they would do well to make their peace with her with considerable abjectness.

They saw at once, when she came in, that there was a great improvement in her looks. The downcast, listless, timid manner which had of late characterised her when in their society had given place to her old, easy, irresponsible air, and she shook hands with them and suffered them to kiss her with a good grace.



"I've come to tell you," she said, when the greetings were over, "in the first place that I've had a letter from Chris, saying that he won't be back till February at the earliest."

"Yes. We've heard that, too," said Mrs. Thorne, who indeed had been warned by her husband from the outset that this would be the case.

"And he asks what I am going to do. He says that of course I can't go on living in the furnished house by myself all that time."

"You'll come to us, of course," said Mrs. Thorne promptly. "We shall be delighted to have you, and we won't worry you to do anything you don't like. You shall not be bothered with any little duties, and as for housekeeping, Chris says you show the most wonderful aptitude without any teaching."

Patricia was always looked upon in her home circle as the beauty of the family, but not by any means as a clever woman. Now, however, she was certainly developing intelligence which went far to justify her own constantly repeated assertion that she was not such a fool as people supposed.

She felt sure that these kind words would not have been addressed to her but for the timely arrival of Myra upon the scene. She knew what an impression her sister's dress and brilliant court must have made upon Carrie and Millie, in spite of the disapproval which they would profess; and she was disgusted with this belated attempt to make it up with her, now that they saw she was independent of them.

mean to spend the winter at my old

"What, the Heronry?"

"No. We only live there in the at the house in Lancaster Gate no next May."

There was an uneasy silence. Th even understood that the Goldsmitl but had supposed that they rented the season. They felt more than their lost opportunities.

"Will Christopher like your going asked Mrs. Thorne, "when he cert to stay with us?"

Patricia, who could now afford to b took advantage of the chance.

"May I say just what I think, And without waiting for permission, know that Christopher would prefer you, and therefore, if you had treated have done so. But you haven't



The ladies experienced, at this terribly plain speaking, the keenest sensation of discomfort and humiliation which they had ever collectively known.

Patricia went on with increasing emphasis; she would be heard now, she was determined:—

"So I'm going back to my people, who would be very much disgusted if they knew how horrid you've been—all of you except Millie. And if Chris is angry with me for going, I am sure of one thing, that he would have been much, much angrier with you if he had known the little mean ways in which you've done your best to make me uncomfortable and unhappy, and to prevent my settling down here. I daresay it's old Mr. Thorne's fault—he got it into his head that I was extravagant and should spend all Chris's money foolishly. But I don't think I should. At any rate, I should have made him comfortable. And if what he's hinted to me is true, you have never succeeded even in doing that."

This speech Patricia delivered quite fluently, in a level tone, without raising her voice, though she occasionally grew emphatic.

The ladies were astounded, and confounded, too, by the large amount of shrewdness which it betrayed. Patricia's manner was always so simple, her voice was so subdued, her great blue eyes were so childlike, that, like many other pretty women, she generally got credit for a great deal less intelligence than she really possessed.

There was a silence when she had finished, and she

got up to go. Carrie voiced the family feelings for them.

"If we've been wrong—we haven't been all you say, but perhaps we haven't been just what you would have liked—well, we're sorry. Won't you think better of it, and stay with us?"

"No, thank you," said Patricia firmly. "I've made my arrangements. You will say good-bye to Mr. Thorne for me. I'm sure he doesn't want to see me, and I don't think I particularly want to see him."

Her woman's instinct had pointed out to her who was the chief offender in the conspiracy against her. The ladies bade her good-bye in a crestfallen manner, and Patricia went back to the hotel. She felt rather sore, not indeed because she would not again see these women for some time, but because she had tried to conciliate them at the outset, and had signally failed. And she knew that Chris would hear their versions of the matter as well as her own, and that he would be wounded and angry.

Well, she could not help it. And she was manifestly not the person to be blamed.

She got back to the hotel in a highly nervous state, and Myra condoled with her on the necessity of having to go near the horrid people at all.

That afternoon, however, when she was sitting in Myra's sitting-room at the hotel, while her sister and the French maid were engaged in packing up, a waiter came in and announced that a lady wished to see Mrs.

Christopher Thorne. Patricia turned and saw Millie, who was standing shyly in the corridor outside.

Pat ran out to her and dragged her into the room.

"It was nice of you to come," she said. "I did so hate to have to talk like that to you, but you know very well it wasn't meant for you, but for the others."

Millie, who was trembling, burst into tears.

"Oh, Patricia," she said sobbing, "it's dreadful to have to say it; but, though you were more unkind than you need have been, what you said was true or nearly true. You have been treated badly I know. And foolishly, too. For if they'd had any sense they might have made your marriage to Chris good for us as well as for him."

Pat laughed.

"Well, yes, I think they might," she said.

"And now I've come to beg that you'll think better of what you said, and that you'll come to us after all."

Pat drew herself up.

"No," she said. "I should have had to, I know, if your people had been good to me; but, Millie, I shouldn't have liked it. These last two days that I've lived as I used to live, with my own people, and in the old way, have been heaven, just heaven."

Millie looked shocked.

"You mean you were miserable when Chris was with you!"

"Oh, no, it was all right then—in spite of your people and the way they tried to make it all wrong. But since he's been away, and I've had nobody to go to,

or to come near me, except to snub me, it's been diabolically horrid. There, be shocked at my language if you like, I don't care."

"I'm not shocked. But I'm—I'm broken-hearted," sobbed Millie.

"Why should you be? Chris will know it's not your fault."

"I'll tell you. You're going back to a life that Chris doesn't approve of, to be with people who live differently, not only from us, but from the way in which you and Chris want to live, and ought to live."

"There's nothing wrong in it," said Patricia sharply.

"Wrong! No, I don't say that, but still it's not what Chris likes."

"You may be quite sure I shan't forget that I'm his wife, and shan't do anything that he wouldn't approve of," said Patricia quite gently, feeling the truth which underlay her sister-in-law's words.

"Ah! You don't know! You think me an ignorant girl, and you look down on me because I'm not used to your London people and your London ways. But I know that your people do things which it would be better for a young wife away from her husband not to do; I know that Mrs. Aylwin does things I shouldn't like you to do, and has a train of young men about her that Chris wouldn't like to know were hanging about *you!*"

"One of the 'train' you saw yesterday is her brother and mine," said Patricia.

"Yes, I know. But the other wasn't."



"Well, there's no harm in Billie Buckie."

"Billie Buckie!" echoed Millie, shocked.

"That's his nickname."

"There! That's just what I meant. I know and you know that Chris wouldn't like to see you surrounded by a lot of young men that you call by nicknames."

Billie laughed in her old happy, irresponsible, indolent way.

"Well, if he was so particular he shouldn't have gone away," she said mutinously. "Or, if he thought my habits and manners so shocking, he shouldn't have married me. I always called the boys by nicknames before, and I don't see any harm in it, and I shall go on doing it."

Millie dried her eyes in despair.

"Of course you will. I knew it wouldn't be of any use for me to come," she said hopelessly. "What does it matter to you what I say now? Even Chris himself will soon count for nothing with you in comparison with all the things you like and are used to, now you've got them back again!"

And she glanced round her, first at the pretty afternoon frock which her sister-in-law was wearing, and at the jewels, put away recently, which she was again wearing, and then at the luxurious room in which she was sitting, into which Mrs. Aylwin had had imported for her short stay flowers, hothouse fruit, extra easy chairs and cushions, and a certain air of luxurious living that spoke volumes.

Patricia was shocked.

"I hope you don't mean what you say!"

Millie was silent and began to cry again. Patricia looked rather frightened. In her heart of hearts she even acknowledged that there was a substratum of truth in this awful accusation, and knew that, mingled with her joy at finding herself again with her sister and friends, she had a secret sense of relief that Chris was not there to interfere with her restored pleasures.

But she was hurt at the accusation, nevertheless.

"You'd better write to Chris, and tell him that I don't care for him then," said Patricia, "and complete the good work your father has long since begun of driving us apart altogether."

Millie uttered an exclamation of horror.

"Oh, Patricia, how can you? I didn't mean that, of course."

"Didn't you? But if what you say were true, that would be the end of it, wouldn't it?"

Millie's tears had dried up from fright.

"I only wanted to warn you," she whispered hurriedly.

"You did more than that. However, we don't want to wrangle about it. I've definitely made up my mind to stay with my own people till Chris comes back, and then I mean to live in London. I've tried hard to get on up here, and I can't, and I've found out that he likes my way of life better than yours. So, if your father keeps his word to us, there ought to be no



further difficulties, and in the meantime, as I said, I shall live my own life my own way."

For the first time in all their intercourse, Millie noted a tone of stubbornness in Patricia's voice which warned her that she was not the meek and pliable being her gentle voice, baby-like beauty and amiable manners might have led one to suppose.

She could make up her mind, on occasion, as well as old Christopher Thorne himself.

She kissed Millie, tried to persuade her to stay to tea, an invitation which the girl received as if it had been a proposal of a somewhat shocking kind, and bade her good-bye very differently from the way she had done it when Millie was with her mother and sister.

No sooner had the door closed behind Millie than Mrs. Aylwin, dressed in a silk dressing-gown of cream and pink, with black velvet bows and diamonds, in which she looked uglier and sallower than ever, bounced into the room in a state of triumph.

Patricia was startled by her first words, which betrayed the fact that her sister had been eavesdropping.

"Bravo, Pat! That's right! Stand up to 'em. Tell them what you think of them! And now, I should hope, we've seen the last, the very last of the brutes!"

"Oh, hush!" said Patricia softly. "She's a good, kind creature, and I hated to make her cry! And there's a lot of sense in what she said, too. If only her people were not quite so dreadful!"

Mrs. Aylwin, however, resented Millie's visit.



"Who are they that they should object to our friends? And to nicknames, indeed!"

Patricia rubbed her chin thoughtfully.

"I'm going to give up using them myself," she said. "Chris wouldn't like me to go on using them, I know, and it is a bad habit. It's common, isn't it?"

"Common! Well, I don't care. I've never troubled my head whether a thing was common or not, if it pleased me to do it," said Myra quite truthfully. "And you can call Bill 'Lord William Buckland' if you like, but you will only get laughed at for your pains!"

"I shan't mind that," said Patricia, who was as obstinate as Myra in her own different way.

Her sister, seeing that she was what she called "cross," sat down beside her and nestled up to her.

"Don't let us quarrel," she said, "now that we're together again, too! We shall be back in town to-night, and you shall see Mamma and Papa again, and be their darling, just in the old way."

Patricia uttered a smothered sob.

"Not quite in the old way," she said under her breath.

"No, that's the worst of it," wailed Myra. "And to think, Pat, that, if only you'd waited a few weeks longer, you could have married Giles Wendover."

Patricia started.

"What!" said she, in a whisper of amazement.

"Yes. Haven't you heard? That uncle of his, in whom we'd begun not to believe at all, did die, and did leave him practically all his money."



"Oh!"

"You know Giles used to say he would, and we used to laugh, and to say he'd leave it to a dog's hospital. Well, he hasn't. And Giles, instead of having to scrape along on a few hundreds, has a fortune, I don't know exactly what, but sixty or seventy thousand pounds, I believe."

Patricia looked interested and thoughtful.

"I wonder whom he'll marry now," she said. "That Bartlett girl perhaps?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Oh, Pat, isn't it a pity?"

"Isn't what a pity?"

"Why, you know what I mean—a pity that you didn't wait."

Pat sat up.

"I don't think so," said she. "Giles isn't half such a good fellow as Christopher, and he didn't care for me as much."

"How do you know that?"

"If he had he'd have married me in the spring, when I was quite willing. He hung back, and talked about his poor prospects and the rest of it."

"Well, they were poor then. He couldn't know that he would have this money, and so soon."

"It doesn't matter," persisted Pat obstinately. "If he had really, really cared for me, cared for me as poor Chris does, he would have married me and risked it, just as Chris did."

"Well, if he had, he wouldn't have run away from you within a month or two, as Thorne has done."

Pat burst into tears.

"You're just as unkind as the Thornes," she sobbed.

Myra flung her arms round her.

"No, no, dear, no, I'm not. I didn't mean to vex you, and if Christopher isn't up to much, I daresay Giles wouldn't have been either. Husbands are all alike, and not worth troubling about. The thing is to get married and then to do as you like in spite of them. To let your husband go his way and to go yours—just as I do."

With which charmingly frank exposition of the whole duty of a wife Myra kissed her weeping sister, and by making her laugh succeeded in restoring her to calmness.

Patricia felt that it was wrong to laugh, that she ought to have tried to show her how wrong she was, and what a fatal thing it would be for the world if everybody were to take life in the way she suggested.

But it was of no use to argue with Myra; she was too well satisfied with the result of her own peculiar code. And Patricia fell to marvelling at the strange position she herself was in, between the one set of women who were so very, very strict and so very, very unsympathetic, and the other. who were so very much the reverse in every way.

And she wondered whether the one was so very much better than the other, after all.

Which was not a wholesome frame of mind for the strictly virtuous and superior Thornes to have brought about in her.



CHAPTER XII

IF Patricia had time to indulge in moral reflections before her journey to London, she had very little leisure later for such speculations.

The luxurious Myra had a compartment in the train reserved for them, and she and Patricia and her dogs and the maid had it to themselves. Myra chattered incessantly the whole way about the things she had been doing and was going to do, about their friends and about Lorna, whose health had been unsatisfactory of late, and who talked of wintering on the Riviera.

Patricia, who had never been to the south of France, said wistfully that she wished Christopher had been ordered there instead of to Russia, so that she could have gone with him.

"You might go without him," suggested Myra. "You might go with Lorna."

Patricia sighed.

She knew that, much as Chris disliked Myra, he disliked Lorna more. And, as she had respected his wishes to the extent of choosing to remain at her mother's house rather than with Myra, she felt that to go away with Lorna was not to be thought of.

If Myra's friends were undesirable, Lorna's were more so. And while Myra's indiscretions were committed under the shelter of her husband's protection, and her loud-voiced flirtations were condoned by their

very openness, and by the fact that Mr. Aylwin saw no more harm in them than any one else did. Lorna was a woman of a different type, and a widow besides, and people were not so indulgent to her, although she gave far less opportunity for chatter.

And the world was right, and so was Christopher.

"I'll see what Mamma says," said Patricia.

The first thing Mrs. Goldsmith did say when she saw her daughter was by no means complimentary to her son-in-law.

As she looked up into Patricia's face, sharpened already in outline and altered a little in expression, she said viciously:—

"I knew those beastly 'good' people wouldn't agree with you! You're thinner in the face and you don't look half so happy as you did before you were married."

"That's because Chris has had to go away, Mamma," answered Patricia presently. "It isn't pleasant for a wife to look fat and happy when her husband's away!"

And she patted her mother's cheek with her old affectionate patronage and then rushed past her into the dining-room, and flung her arms round her father's neck as he sat near the fire with his *Globe* in his hands, and nestled against him, just as she used to do, and drew a long sigh of joy to be back again.

It was all very pleasant and very jolly; and Patricia, as she sat after dinner cracking nuts by the fire, and putting sweet biscuits on the nose of the old dog Rover, for him to throw in the air and catch, felt a sense of peace and happiness and comfort, and told

herself that Chris could not object to such innocent pleasures as those she was enjoying.

After all, this was as domestic a household as that of the Thornes, only in a different way. And when Jim and Bob, her two brothers, took her into the [illegible] corn, and twitted her on the shocking way [illegible] her play had gone off, and reminded her of the compliments which used to be paid to her as the best lady-player anybody knew, Patricia laughed contritely, and told them they need not worry themselves, she would soon be in her old form again, and should beat them as thoroughly as ever when she had got over her journey and had a few days' practice.

And then the shopping next day! It was bliss unutterable to have a full purse and Bond Street to go to! She and Myra spent the greater part of the day in the latter's electric motor-brougham, buying a thousand things they didn't want, on pretence of making a start with Patricia's furnishing.

And then they felt bound to wind up the afternoon with a call at Lorna's flat.

Lady Gane was at home, and was looking very ill in spite of her make-up.

"When I don't feel well the powder won't stick on," she remarked plaintively to her sisters when they condoled with her on her appearance.

"You should do as I do—put something on underneath to make it stick," retorted Mrs. Aylwin robustly.

"My dear, I don't care to look quite like a clown," was Lady Gane's sisterly comment on this informa-

tion. She turned to Patricia: "You'll have to take to powder, too. dear." she said. "You've gone off terribly!"

Patricia shook her head and laughed. She was not vain, for such a pretty woman, and perhaps she suspected the source of this criticism as tainted with envy.

"All the better," she said composedly. "It's as well that I shouldn't be too good-looking, now I have no one to look after me!"

"Dear me, no. Tell me all about it. Your husband's gone off somewhere or other, hasn't he? Another woman, I suppose?"

"Woman! No," cried Patricia indignantly. "He's gone, much against his will, to do some business of his father's."

"But he shouldn't have gone," said Lorna.

"Well, never mind me," said Patricia. "I'm sorry to see you looking so ill, Lorna. What's the matter with you?"

"I've had influenza. I'm a wreck. They want me to go abroad for the winter, but it's too wretched. I've nobody but Richards, and I may as well die comfortably in my flat as wander about by myself on the chance of getting better. And I shouldn't, you know, I should go melancholy mad."

"Why don't you take Pat with you?" asked Mrs. Aylwin.

Lady Gane looked at her youngest sister in surprise.

"Are you going to be alone all the winter then?" she asked.

Patricia blushed and bit her lip.

"I'm very much afraid so."

Lorna sat up in her chair, and a tinge of colour came into her cheeks.

"Oh, would you go with me—to Cannes or anywhere? I'd go if you would. And I've had the offer of the loan of a flat in Paris for a month. We might take that on our way."

Patricia's eyes sparkled. She had been in Paris a good deal, for her parents often took a flat there for two or three months at a time. But as she had been there only in her young-girl days, she had not been able to go about much.

"I should like that," she said. "When will you be going?"

Lorna looked delighted.

"As soon as you like. I'm as ill as ever I can be here, and the journey won't be long, and won't do me much harm. I could go next week, this week even."

"All right," said Patricia. "If you would care to have me, I'll go."

There was still a qualm of conscience within her as to her husband's views on such a matter as this. If he objected to Myra, and she had made his objection a reason for refusing to stay with her, what would he say to her going abroad alone with Lorna, whom he liked much less?

Myra perceived this inconsistency, and began to laugh, swinging herself gently backwards and forwards on her chair.

"It's rather good, really," she said, "to hear you agreeing to go away with Lorna, when you wouldn't stay with me. I'm a lamb of innocence compared to her, ain't I?"

Lorna frowned disdainfully.

"There's not much dissipation in going about with a creature who's little better than an invalid!" she remarked quietly. "Pat can make her own conditions, and arrange never to go out except to church. I don't mind, as long as I have her with me!"

"There, don't be cross," said Mrs. Aylwin. "I don't mind people's being inconsistent. I'm full of inconsistencies myself. All I care about is seeing that poor Pat gets some one to look after her, and that you get some one to look after you. You ought to be mutually helpful, and—between you—you ought to contrive to enjoy yourselves, too."

And she laughed maliciously.

Lorna was full of excitement at the proposed change, and the conditions suggested.

"If I were not so wretchedly, miserably poor," she said, "I'd have an invalid's carriage put on the train. As it is, I must do the best I can without it."

"It's only the bit from Calais to Paris that really matters, isn't it?" said Patricia soothingly. "The journey down to Dover is so short, and as we're all good sailors the crossing will do you good rather than harm."

"Oh, I don't mind the crossing, of course," said Lady Gane, who was, though out of health, not nearly so ill

as she affected to believe, and whose real reason for making this complaint was that she liked to travel in such a way as to attract attention.

Everything was settled on the spot, and Patricia agreed to be ready to start early in following week, leaving herself time to receive another letter from her husband in answer to hers announcing her departure from Farnfield.

She was very anxious about this answer, and when it arrived she was greatly distressed by it.

Christopher was very deeply grieved, and angry too, at the decision she had come to, and told her that she might have consulted him about it. He was obliged to admit that her position was intolerable up there, and that some change was necessary; but he thought she ought to have written to him before deciding on leaving the town and returning to her parents.

He ended with a cautious reminder that she was not to forget her new dignity as a married woman, he entreated her not to go about more than she could help with her sisters, and he wound up with a passionate appeal to her not to forget him, and not to forget that he loved her with all his heart, and that he would never be happy until he was by her side again, to protect and comfort her.

Patricia cried a little over the letter, but was rather relieved to find that her husband treated her conduct more indulgently than she had expected.

The fact was that Christopher himself saw that

some such step on her part was inevitable, when h found himself compelled to remain away for so long.

After all, she was not likely to come to much ha as long as she remained under her father's roof, es cially when, as usual in the winter season, that ro was at Lancaster Gate, and not that of the Heron Life was more bohemian, less strict and conventiona at the pleasant summer retreat on the banks of th Thames; and in the decorous London house there woul be no canoe parties, no punting expeditions, and muc less chance of the sort of flirtation which, howeve harmless it might be in itself, Christopher dreaded t find in the atmosphere surrounding his beautiful young wife.

Patricia kissed his letter, tucked it away inside her dress as usual, and went upstairs to do her packing.

What would he say when he learned that she was away with Lady Gane? He would not like it, even though it was a case of illness. For Patricia herself knew how likely it was that the invalid would develop unexpected robustness when she got near the theatres and shops of Paris and the casinos and restaurants of the south.

However, she had taken the decisive step, and she had to go on. Patricia congratulated herself, nevertheless, more and more, on the escape she had had from Barnsfield and the Thornes.

On the day of the journey Lady Gane arrived at the station in a most interesting get-up of handsome

wraps and cloaks and attended by her maid laden with pillows, smelling-bottles and flasks of various sorts.

Lorna herself already looked better, however, and though she lay back in her corner seat in the train in an interesting attitude, and closed her eyes as if in suffering, Patricia guessed that she knew more of what was going on round her than any one else in the compartment.

They travelled very comfortably; Lady Gane bore the journey well, and they found, on arriving at the flat, an *entresol* in the Rue Tronchet, near the Madeleine, that they had got very comfortable quarters.

For the first two days they rested, Lady Gane being really a good deal fatigued, and Patricia being unwilling to leave her.

On the third day, however, Patricia felt the impulse to go out and join in the delightful bustle of the Paris streets too strong for her, and, with the excuse of getting flowers at the Madeleine Market, she went out with the maid.

They were too late in the day to get the first choice of flowers, but that mattered little to Patricia, who had simply wanted an excuse to be out of doors. She bought a bouquet of cut flowers and a couple of pots of growing plants, and then, reluctantly, turned back again towards the flat.

She had led such a starved life lately that she began to feel all sorts of longings stirring within her, the wish to go out, to drive into the Bois, to visit the churches, to saunter among the shops, to dine at the

restaurants, and yes, to go to the theatres, too. seemed an age since she had been to the theatre, who loved the stage and all connected with it, as i the fashion to do in the sort of society in wh'ch people lived.

Returning very slowly, she was struck, as she rea the *porte cochère* of the house where they were s ing, by the smart appearance of a motor-car that standing outside.

The long engines told of great power, and the colo cream outside and bright scarlet within, pleased fancy. What a rug there was, too, lying inside! bearskin, lined with green cloth, which she thought of the handsomest she had ever seen.

Running upstairs, she let herself in with their and bursting into the *salon,* which was a pretty sq room with a painted ceiling, she cried before she well inside:—

"Oh, Lorna, do look out! There's such a lo car standing just outside. I wonder whose it i

She checked her steps, and uttered an exclamat as a man whom she now perceived lounging in a c by the hearth, rose and held out his hand.

"It's mine, Mrs. Thorne, and very much at y service," said he.

It was Giles Wendover.

CHAPTER XIII

PATRICIA drew back with an exclamation. So unexpected was this meeting, so strong was the rush of old memories which the sight of Giles aroused in her, that for the moment she felt half-stunned, and instead of advancing frankly and brightly, in her old way, to meet him, she hung back, timid and almost tearful, near the door, while Lorna laughed from her chair by the hearth, and Giles continued to hold out his hand, somewhat humbly and timidly, without her appearing to take any notice of it.

Lorna spoke first, putting an end to the rather awkward pause.

"Why, Pat, what's the matter with you? Don't you remember Giles? Has your terrible experience of Yorkshire wiped out the recollection of the old days at home, and of the old people?"

Patricia had grown suddenly very pale. The causes were manifold.

In the first place it was unkind of Lorna to revert to that unpleasant subject of her north country experiences, which her younger sister wished to banish from her mind altogether. In the second place, Patricia was really rather thrown off her balance by the sudden and unexpected appearance of her old sweetheart. And in the third place, Giles himself looked so obviously agitated and disturbed by the meeting, that his usually

rather expressionless face seemed quite strange, almost distorted, and his manner was as different as possible from his old cheery, rather off-hand ways.

"Of course I remember Mr. Wendover perfectly," said Patricia at last.

Whereupon Lorna laughed mockingly again.

"Mrs. Thorne—Mr. Wendover! Dear me, how correct we have all grown! What a Bohemian you strictly proper people make poor old me feel!"

"Oh, rubbish, Lorna!" said Patricia, recovering that dignity which was a natural possession of the handsome young woman.

"She talks as if we were a couple of rustics at a country fair, doesn't she?" said Giles.

Patricia smiled as she advanced to her sister and threw off her cloak. She had omitted to shake hands with Giles, but he could not tell whether it was by inadvertence or of *malice prepense*.

"You have a beautiful car!" she said. "Is it a French one or English?"

"I've just brought it over from England," he answered. "By-the-bye, Lorna, you didn't tell me I should have the pleasure of meeting—er—your sister."

Patricia was startled by these words, which told her that Lorna had written to Giles to meet her in Paris.

"I wasn't sure—till quite the last moment, that I should induce her to come," replied Lady Gane, not one whit ashamed of her secret act. "Pat's rather an erratic person, and I thought she might perhaps play me false at the last."

Patricia shot at her sister a look which implied that she did not believe a word of this explanation. Indeed, Lady Gane was one of those persons, anxious to keep the wheels of life well oiled for those around them as well as themselves, whose "tact" prevent their ever speaking the exact truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to anybody. She never made a statement without weighing well the effect it would have upon those to whom it was made, and never answered a question without the same caution.

"Well, the result is delightful. For where I only expected to meet one charming woman, I now meet two," said Giles.

"I am the person who will suffer," said Lady Gane with an affectation of regret. "For you certainly won't pay much attention to poor me when Pat is about. You and she were always such pals, weren't you?"

Patricia frowned, and Giles said:—

"Ah, that was in the old days, before she was a dignified married woman."

"When did you arrive in Paris?" asked Patricia, anxious to divert the conversation from herself and her new status.

"This morning," said he. "I should have called before this, but I didn't know whether you received earlier."

"You would have come earlier, you mean," said Lorna, "if only you had known you would meet two persons instead of one."

Patricia resented strongly the attitude taken by her

...ving herself away. But t
altogether was outrageous, Pati

"I was awfully sorry to hea
What was the matter?"

"Oh, the influenza fiend. I
that I'm out of England. I wa
and to restaurants to dine, and

"I'm entirely at your service

"You're a dear, Giles. We'
the test at once. Take us so
you?"

But Patricia interposed.

"No, Lorna, you're not going
said. "It would be madness wh
over your journey."

"Well, let Giles take you som
want to keep you moping at hon

"Of course I shan't go with
sense!"

Patricia's tone was growing
ought not to make ther...

"And say what I like," retorted Patricia. "And I shall tell you presently what I think of your suggesting such silly things."

"Why silly?"

"You don't suppose Chris would allow me to go about without him with anybody but you?" said Patricia boldly.

"Oh, I see. You're afraid of your country husband's being jealous," said Lorna, in a tone of subdued mockery most unpleasant to the young wife's ear.

"Of course he wouldn't. Chris knows me too well," retorted Patricia. "But Chris or no Chris, I don't mean to go about except with you while he's away."

"Away, is he? That's rather hard on you, so soon after your marriage, isn't it?" said Giles.

Patricia, at once appeased by the tone of sympathy, sat down and, turning to him, poured out her heart. Indignation with her sister made it easy to be confidential to some one else.

"Hard? Indeed it is! Fancy his horrid old father's sending him away to Russia for months and months! Isn't it cruel?"

"Yes, indeed! I wonder Thorne—I mean young Thorne—didn't strike!"

Patricia gave a little sigh.

"Ah," she said, "the worst of it is that it was I who insisted upon his going! Of course I didn't think he'd be away so long, and we were offered a bribe, a house in London, and Chris was to have a partnership or

something there! You see, the pill was so well gilded that we couldn't tell how horrid it was!"

"I see," said Giles with grave and kindly sympathy, as he leaned forward and looked into the little wood fire, which, as the blower had not been drawn down for quite ten minutes, was a mere ashy pretense of a fire, giving out no heat but plenty of wood-ash. "It was a shame!"

"Yes, and the wicked part of it was that I'm sure the old man knew from the first that he'd be away longer than he said."

Giles had always thought her lovely; now he thought she had grown more instead of less beautiful since her marriage. The once utterly babyish face, though a little sharper, not quite so rounded in outline, had acquired a new expressiveness, a softer look. The great blue eyes were no longer those of a child, but of an enchanting woman.

Giles had always thought her lovely, now he thought a stronger word would be needed to describe her.

"What was old Thorne's object?" asked he abruptly.

The look of interest on his face opened Patricia's heart to him. His sympathy, from whatever cause it arose, was genuine, not like the shrugs and sighs of Lorna, which could never be relied on to express in any way what she really felt.

"Ah!" she said with a nod of deep meaning, as she looked away from him, and leaning her cheek upon her hand gazed at the pink embers of the log on the

hearth, "that's what one asks oneself. And," she went on eagerly, her breath coming fast as her excitement rose, "as I know for a certainty that he is a horror, a perfect horror, a terror to his family, and, oh—not at all a nice man in any way, my own impression is very strong that his motive was a bad one."

Giles drew nearer.

"But what could it have been?" he said eagerly, lowering his voice.

Patricia pursed up her mouth with decision.

"Well, it looks to me," she said slowly, "as if his father were trying purposely to make dissensions between us, to drive us apart from each other."

"Surely the old brute couldn't be as bad as that!"

She turned to him with a face full of excitement.

"Doesn't it look like it?" she demanded. "But I'm forgetting, of course, you don't know what he's like. If you knew him, if you'd heard how his wife and daughters dread him and give way to him, you'd understand."

"But what object could he have? I can't imagine how a man could be anything but delighted at his son's marrying a beautiful woman like you! And such a nice woman, and good and sweet and everything that is attractive!"

Patricia stopped in the middle of her discussion to smile slowly and with amusement.

"Oh, I didn't mean to draw down upon myself all that fire of compliments," she said merrily.

"No, and I didn't mean to pay any. I was simply stating facts to carry on the argument. I can't think what the old idiot wanted."

"I think I know though," said Patricia. "He wanted his son to marry a woman like his own wife—a little above a housekeeper, but not much; a woman who would have a black silk dress for Sundays and would wear cotton gloves on week-days."

Giles uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"And when Chris committed the unpardonable sin of marrying poor me, his father was furious, and made up his mind to make him as uncomfortable as he could, as a punishment."

"But that's madness, to cause dissensions between his own son and his wife!"

Patricia slowly shook her head.

"There's no insanity about old Thorne," she said shrewdly. "He would like to see Chris settled abroad, or somewhere where I wouldn't go, in order that he might spend less money! He thinks I'm extravagant, which is all the seven deadly sins in one to the people up there, and he's afraid I should make Chris live comfortably, as we do down in the south, instead of in the way they do up there. Oh, if you were to see them! The miserable house, the food, everything. And the best of it is, that Chris dislikes that sort of thing just as much as we do. He was horribly ashamed, poor old dear, of letting me see the beggarly way in which everything was done at his parents' house. And I feel as if I were somehow breaking con-



fidence in telling you. But, oh! it is a relief, sometimes, to speak out about it all. And especially about my poor dear old boy. You see, Lorna and Myra don't care about him, and he doesn't care about them; so I can't speak out and ask for their sympathy."

"But you can for mine," said Giles earnestly. "And it doesn't matter what you tell to an old friend like me. Because you know it won't go any further, and, of course, I won't mention it before Lorna, or let her know I know more than she does, as I suppose I do already?"

"Yes, oh, yes," said Patricia in a low voice.

While they were talking, Lorna had got up, arranged the flowers her sister had brought in a couple of bowls which stood on a side-table, and had then gone out to fetch some water for them.

Patricia, who knew very well that her sister was anxious for her and Giles to be on friendly terms again, instead of the rather stiff footing on which they had begun, took advantage at once of her absence to let Giles understand just how things stood, and how fond she and Chris were of each other, and how badly they felt they had been treated.

"I always thought young Thorne was a good sort, though he did carry off the prize I'd set my heart on!" said Giles after a pause.

But Patricia laughed at this.

"Oh, come, now, Giles," she retorted, dropping, without noticing what she was doing, into the use of his Christian name again, "you and I both know

better than that! The prize was to be had for the asking—once. And it was your own fault that you didn't choose to ask."

"And why didn't I? Because I was too poor! You don't suppose I'd have married a lovely girl like you if I had had to leave her alone for half a year, because I was too poor to be my own master? Surely?"

Patricia was aghast. She turned to him in anger.

"Do you mean to insinuate," she asked hotly, "that Chris could have done anything but what he did do? Do you imagine that he doesn't care for me, just because he took my advice and went abroad to make me a home the quicker?"

"No, no, no, my dear child, of course I don't."

"Don't call me that, please," said Patricia sharply. "I'm grown up now!"

"Yes, yes, of course you are. Oh, don't be angry! It was so nice to come in here, and for you to run on, just as you used to do in the old days—and I wouldn't for the world say anything to spoil it all!"

He was so humble, so meek, that Patricia could not say more. But she held her head very high, and sat very stiffly, just to show him the difference that existed between Pat of the old Heronry days, whom he used to call "dear child" and pick strawberries for, and Mrs. Christopher Thorne.

He was so afraid of not choosing just the right words to say that he remained silent, and clasping his hands loosely in front of him, affected to stare at the fire, while all the while he was furtively regarding



Patricia's handsome profile as seen against the fading light outside the window.

Lorna came in with the jug of water in her hands, and fidgeted about among her flowers.

"What's the matter with you two?" she said at last, when she had been in the room some moments without hearing a word spoken by the couple by the fire. "You've not been quarrelling again, have you?"

Patricia jumped up with a frown.

"Quarrelling! Of course not. What on earth is there to quarrel about? Haven't you any tea for me?"

"Yes, of course. And for Giles, too. What are you going to do with yourself to-night, Giles?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Unless you'll take pity on me and invite me to dinner?"

"Shall we, Pat?"

"Just as you like, dear. If you won't be overtiring yourself talking."

"Oh, she shan't. I'll sit quite silent, like a good boy, and just stuff. It will be pleasure enough to be with you both again."

"And what will you do with the car?" asked Patricia, who was at the window, leaning forward to look at the vehicle which had attracted her admiration.

"Won't you both take a run with me in the Bois between now and dinner? It's not at all cold; we could wrap you up to the eyes, Lorna, and it would do you good."

THE sisters had no opportu
fidentially together until
that night to the flat, and th
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her sister, pleaded fatigue, and
talk it over in the morning, the n
to make a protest about what she

She was not, however, to escap

Before she was up next morni
a figure, wrapped in a dressing-
bed.

"Good gracious, what's the ma
me, child."

"Well, you know I have some
What did you send for Giles
must have come over from Engla
you."

"Well, and what if he did? T
coming, is there?"

"I don't like the way you've

go on encouraging Giles Wendover to behave to me just as he did before I was married."

"What do you mean? How dare you say such a thing to me? Do you know what you're accusing me of?"

"Oh, yes, I know very well," said outspoken Patricia. "You're still very angry about my marrying poor Chris, and you want to behave, and to make me behave, as if he didn't exist. But I won't stand that. And if you go on, I shall go back home."

"What! To Barnsfield?" sneered Lorna.

Patricia reddened.

"No, to Lancaster Gate, of course."

"Of course! There! You've given it away by saying that. Look here, Pat, you're miserable when you're away from us all, and it's of no use to pretend you're not. And when you get again among the old set, you wake up, and your eyes dance again, and you hold up your head, as you used to do. Am I to blame, child, if I bring you back among your old friends, and make you enjoy life again in the way you always did at home? There's no harm in it, and you're no worse, and we're no worse, than your husband's relations. Now are we?"

"No, I don't suppose we are."

"Then how are you the worse for doing as you've always done, and going about and enjoying yourself?"

Patricia frowned.

"It's of no use talking to you!" she said.

"Not a bit," agreed Lady Gane. "Because what I say is common sense."

And she turned over and pretended to go to sleep again, leaving Patricia quite conscious of having failed in making any impression on her.

Patricia had one great difficulty to contend with: she did not know whether to tell Chris in her next letter that Giles Wendover had met them in Paris and was taking her and her sister about. For Giles called again that day, and every day, devoted himself to them with zeal and also with discretion, taking care not to jeopardise his position with Patricia by any encroachment, and observing so much restraint that she was grateful to him, and conscious that his coming had made all the difference in their lives.

For what harm was there in going about with Lady Gane and with Giles to dine and to see plays, and to carry out charming excursions to the environs, when he was so unobtrusive, so careful not to offend her, or to do or say anything which might frighten her?

Patricia was conscious that his discreet behaviour was partly at least the result of conference with Lady Gane, and that they had probably laid down a plan of conduct for him by putting their heads together. That, however, really did not matter. The important point was that there was really nothing whatever in his manner or his conversation to alarm her, or to make her feel guilty in enjoying his society.

Giles never attempted to make love to her, never appeared to seek her society rather than that of Lady



Gane, and comported himself on the whole so well that he was a welcome guest with both the sisters, to whom his arrival in Paris meant a great deal in point of added gaiety and freedom of action.

But—and there was the great and difficult "but"—Patricia was conscious that Christopher would be grieved, alarmed and angry if he were to know of Giles Wendover's presence in Paris, near his young wife.

She knew she felt that there was no harm in Giles's visits, while they added greatly not only to her enjoyment but to that of Lorna, the alleged invalid. What ought she then to do? To alarm Chris, who was all those miles away, by telling him of Giles Wendover's presence in Paris? And so to throw him into uncalled-for fits of depression and possible jealousy? Or to say nothing about Giles, and to leave the matter of his visits to be related to her husband when he came back to England?

On the whole Patricia had almost decided to risk it, and to write to him quite fully on the matter, as she did about everything else, when, unluckily, she received a letter, forwarded to her from Lancaster Gate, the first since Christopher had heard of her intended trip abroad with Lady Gane.

Christopher was furious at the news. He reproached his wife most bitterly for her conduct, told her that she did not care for him, that she had been only too glad to send him away in order that she might be able to return to her own people and her old admirers, that if

feeling as well as affection in every
was hurt in her turn by it.

After all, why should he take it f
must be doing wrong if she was amo
What had she ever done to deserve t
so badly of her? And how could he
living the horrible starved life at B
had plenty of relations and friends o
welcome her back among them?

Patricia, even while she cried ov
herself that Chris was hard and unj
ask herself whether there was not son
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flat of Lady Gane.

But this letter affected her so strong
not help showing traces of its effect
and greater taciturnity than usual, an

alarm Patricia by word or deed. He even avoided her a little, noting that her answers to him were shorter than usual and not so kind.

But he watched her with keen eyes, and when he saw a little indication of softening on her part, as if she felt that she was making herself ridiculous by being cold to a man who made no attempt to presume upon their old friendship, he was ready to slip into his old place again, and to be kind and merry and amusing and irresponsible, just in the old way.

Giles was not by any means the only visitor the ladies had, when once their presence in Paris became known to their circle. Friends who were living there, others who were spending a few days there on their way to the Riviera, and one or two who made the presence of the sisters an excuse for a trip from London to see them, all poured into the flat in the course of the afternoon, and although Giles was the most constant visitor, he was so often one in a crowd that his presence did not excite remark.

Even if it had been noticed, Lady Gane was such a popular woman with men that her presence would have been regarded as attraction enough for him or for any man.

The month for which Lady Gane had the flat was drawing near to its close before there was much talk of their next move.

Then, when Lady Gane broached the subject of their journey southward, Giles, who was present, had a suggestion to offer.

Why should they not make the journey in his car? There was plenty of room for what luggage they wanted, and Richards, Lady Gane's maid, was an old traveller, who could be trusted to go on by rail with the rest, and to prepare rooms for them at the other end. Cannes was their first destination, and Giles pointed out, in glowing terms, what a pleasant time they would have of it, as, though they were now in November, the weather was fine and bright, and the roads were still dry.

Lady Gane was willing to listen to the suggestion, but Patricia's eyes absolutely glowed at the recital of the pleasures offered.

She had never toured in a motor-car, her people having been rather nervous about the new introduction, and her brothers' driving having been too erratic for her to be trusted out with them often.

The thought of travelling through a country she did not know, and of stopping at night at old French inns and braving their discomforts, was delightful to her young and adventurous spirit. She uttered a low exclamation of delight when the subject was first mooted, and then, seeing the amusement on the faces of the other two, relapsed into silence to listen to what they each had to say.

Lady Gane was dubious as to the hotels they would have to stay at, and thought that perhaps the whole proceeding was just a thought *too* bohemian.

But Giles overruled her, having, indeed, Patricia's silent ecstasy over the suggestion to help him, and at

last it was arranged that they should start on their journey to Cannes in the motor-car, and do it, by easy stages, in a week.

When they were alone together that night, Lady Gane laughed at her sister.

"Really, you're the most inconsistent creature in the world, Pat," she exclaimed. "After all the fuss you made about my receiving Giles here on a visit, you are the first to agree to this most daring journey! What would your husband say to it?"

Patricia laughed.

"What could he say more than he has said already to my going abroad with you?" she said. "And after all, where is the difference between having Giles here every day and going to dinners and theatres with him, and going in his motor-car to Cannes? It isn't as if there weren't the two of us!"

Lady Gane shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I'm ready to risk it, if you are," she said. "But I tell you it is a risk. You know what motor-cars are. There's always the danger of a break-down, a serious accident; and think how it would look in the papers, the false reports that would appear, and then the contradictions to make them worse, and the rest of it!"

"Oh, well, there are thousands of journeys made without accident, and in any case I can't see that there's any harm in it. And it would be simply lovely, wouldn't it?"

Lady Gane hesitated.



"You're younger than I am," she said, "and the prospect of a series of hard beds in vile inns, with nothing fit to eat for dinner and breakfast may perhaps not seem so appalling to you as it does to me!"

Patricia scoffed at her sister's luxurious tastes, and said that roughing it for a week would do her good.

It was settled then that they should start early on the following Monday, and that Richards should come on by train with the heavy luggage.

The first day was delightful. The ladies, snugly wrapped up and tucked in, sat at the back, and Giles Wendover, who sometimes took a turn at the wheel himself, and sometimes left it to his chauffeur, sat in front and talked to them.

There was a glass screen in front, and a Cape cart hood over them, and they were well provided with veils and goggles, so that Patricia's young blood experienced nothing but exhilaration in the rapid movement of the car.

Lady Gane was not quite so fortunate. Her prudish scruples, indeed, were quite possibly as much the result of her dislike of cold and of the least discomfort, as of any real reluctance she felt at the idea of the journey.

She was a beautiful woman still, but hers was, now, at any rate, a beauty that demanded many hours at her toilet, and a lavish use of powder and cosmetics to produce its due effect. This rough and tumble

scramble through the day, with an hour here and an hour there for meals, followed by a stay at an out of season hotel where the accommodation was poor and the fare indifferent, did not suit either her looks or her temper; and by the end of the second day she either was, or affected to be, so indisposed as to beg Giles to cut short the day's journey, and to stay at a little town about forty miles short of their proposed stopping place.

So they put up for the night at a rambling old inn in a small town, and Lady Gane, after a very indifferent dinner, was in such a bad temper that she insisted upon retiring to rest at once, though she was careful to explain that rest was the last thing she expected to get.

Giles and Patricia, therefore, were left in the big draughty inn sitting-room, to spend the evening together as best they could. Patricia, with whom the cold agreed, and who had enjoyed the journey enormously so far, was, however, in the highest possible spirits; and she curled herself up before the fire and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks at the absurd fuss Lorna was making about nothing; mimicked her little sly attempts to make up her face when the car was approaching a town, by the aid of a little mirror which would only let her see one eye at a time; roasted chestnuts in the wood fire, and enjoyed herself extremely, in a leisurely and quietly mischievous way that made her charming.

Giles Wendover, who had been holding himself well

in check for this long time, felt that the time was getting near when he would be constrained to tell her something of what he felt, something of the emotions with which she inspired him of the passion she excited in him.

Giles, though he could act the part very well, was by no means the chivalrous friend he would have had her think him. Selfish to the core, he had, as she quite rightly thought, refrained from marrying her when she was ready to have him, because marriage at that time would have imposed upon him economies and discomforts which he did not care to endure.

Nor would he, in all probability, have been at all keen on marrying her if she had been still unwed, even though he had no longer the excuse of poverty to restrain his ardour.

Giles was one of those men who prize a thing the more for its being surrounded with real obstacles. And Patricia's calm behaviour, her absolute self-possession, her known fondness for her husband, were all incentives to the passion of this hero of the half-smart set.

She had been charming as a girl; she was irresistible as a married woman.

And, now that he had the chance, Giles set about preparing the way to attract her, without a doubt, a scruple or a qualm.

She was practically deserted by her husband. What, then, was there to stand between him and his wishes?

So, while Patricia sat in front of the fire, her pretty, gold-brown hair glinting in the firelight, and her beau-



tiful face radiant with the pleasant exhilaration of the recent journey, Giles sat a little way behind, with a look on his face which, if she had seen it, would have frightened her, and opened her eyes to her danger.

She was tracing out, with a knitting needle, the route for the following day, on a map which Giles had handed to her. She put the map on a chair beside her, and kneeling upon the floor, followed the course, town by town, and village by village, as he called out the names to her one by one.

"Yes," she said, "I have it all. But I do hope Lorna won't be cross, because if she is, it will cut the day's run short again, besides spoiling all the pleasure of the evening."

Giles uttered a little strange laugh. He drew his own chair nearer, while she was still tracing out the route.

"I don't think the evening is spoilt by her being ill," he said demurely.

"I do, though. It was so jolly last night when she was with us, and in a good temper."

"Well, you're never out of temper."

"Oh, yes, I am sometimes, and I certainly shall be soon if she goes on playing these tricks."

"I should like to see you out of temper, Pat, I really should."

Something in his tone warned her, perhaps, that she had better be careful. She looked up, and was about to rise from her knees, when Giles, taking advantage of her attitude, which did not permit her to escape,

brought his chair forward with a rapid movement, and throwing his arms round her, tried to kiss her.

She thrust him away from her with a cry, and struggled, panting and at a white heat of indignation, to her feet.

At that moment she caught sight of a man's face staring at her and Giles through the aperture of the door, which, for the first time, she now discovered to be half open.



CHAPTER XV

THE language of the half-smart set can be strong on occasion, even on the lips of women. Patricia, h her eyes blazing, stared for a few moments, first Giles, then at the open door, and then once more at es.

'You cad! You howling cad!" said she, with phasis there was no mistaking.

Giles drew himself up and tried to laugh. He had pected a little resistance, real resistance. He had pected all sorts of forms of expostulation, perhaps a on the ear. But he was not prepared for the look utter contempt, bitter, biting, unmistakable, with ich his action was received.

'You have no right to call me that!" he stammered . "If——"

'You are a cad," cried Patricia, interrupting him ore he had time to prepare an excuse, an explanation, nd you will see if Lorna doesn't say so too!"

She marched towards the door; but Giles, frightened, quite aware that Patricia was spirited enough to ke things very uncomfortable for him unless she e softened and conciliated, dashed across the room t, and closing the door, stood in front of it, in a able and pleading attitude.

Pat, Patricia, Mrs. Thorne, listen to me. Wait

one moment. Come, you like to be fair, don't you? Give me just a hearing!"

He was in earnest now, there was no mistake about that. There was intense agitation in his face, in his voice. Clearly he knew she was not to be played with, and she saw that she was in no further danger from his impertinence.

So she met him eye to eye, still fierce, unforgiving, her great blue eyes flashing and her hands clenched.

"What have you go to say? Nothing worth hearing, I'm sure. So get on with your excuses, your sham excuses, and let me go to Lorna."

"Don't be so hard, so angry. I'm sure you wouldn't be if you knew how ashamed I feel——"

"So I should think! What would my brothers say if they could know? As for my husband, if he'd come into the room just then he would have killed you, and I should have said it served you right."

Giles was recovering a little from the shock of the surprise he had experienced at her ferocity and promptitude in dealing with him.

"Well, if your husband had been where a newly married husband is expected to be, with his wife, it wouldn't have happened," said he boldly. "You've been left in an unnatural position, and it follows that one forgets things one ought to remember."

The words were an accusation, and they took Patricia's breath away.

"You mean to insinuate," she said unsteadily, after



a moment's pause, "that my husband oughtn't to have gone away?"

"Oh, I don't like to say that. I've no right to say that. Every man knows his own business best. And if he thought what he had to do abroad was more important than his duty in looking after his wife, of course that's his affair, not mine. No, don't fly out again. Remember, I only answered your question."

Patricia was for a moment struck dumb. She had for a long time vaguely felt that her husband, whatever his other duties might be, had not treated her either wisely or rightly in leaving her so long to her own resources. The feeling, indeed, had helped to justify her in her own mind for her action in leaving Barnsfield and in going abroad against his wishes. But that the action of Chris should appear to other men in such a very strong light as a flagrant breach of conventional behaviour, had not occurred to her till that moment.

For a little while both she and Giles were silent, each hearing the loud breathing of the other, and the man watched the woman, though she did not watch him in return. Indeed, she was too full of her own painful thoughts to have much attention to bestow upon him. She was thinking, not of the present Giles, but of the absent Chris.

But Giles was far from understanding this, and he looked upon it as a favourable opportunity for pushing his own claims to her favour.

"I'm always thinking about you, and about the

wretched position you've been left in," he said, in a very humble tone. "And you can hardly be surprised if, admiring you as I do, and—and thinking so much of you, I should resent what I consider wrong treatment of you, and that I should forget—what I ought not to forget."

Patricia, however, so far from being induced by this pleading tone to condone his behaviour, found fresh matter for resentment in his speech.

"Wrong treatment!" said she sharply. "What do you call your treatment then?"

Giles was confused and then annoyed by this retort. It showed, he thought, what strangely perverse conceptions of things a woman can have, and her want of logic, that she should leave the real matter at issue to attack him like that!

"I have apologised," said he stiffly. "I can't do more."

"Oh, yes, you can," said Patricia quietly. "You can find out the train that takes us on to Cannes tomorrow morning."

This was terrible. Giles felt angry.

"You can't decide that," he said, now with a touch of arrogance, since he found that his humility was thrown away, "until you know what Lorna thinks."

"If she doesn't think as I do," retorted Patricia with spirit, "she can go on where she likes and how she likes—and I'll go straight back alone to Paris."

"You are a little shrew!" muttered Giles angrily.

Patricia nodded with decision. In all her straight-

forward words, her abrupt, decided movements, there was a sort of dignity that he was forced to respect in spite of himself.

"Make way, please," she said sharply.

He opened the door for her but kept his fingers on the handle.

"Won't you forgive me, Pat, when you know—what I feel?"

His tone was melting, so was the look of his blue eyes.

Patricia, however, looked him full in the face and met his pleading gaze with one of steel.

"Rubbish!" she said shortly.

He persisted.

"You can't know what it is," he said in a tremulous voice, as he shut the door again gently and hoped she wouldn't notice the fact, "to have to see the woman you admire most in all the world left stranded, deserted, for the time at any rate, by the very man who ought to have made her his first care. If you knew, you would understand what I think—what I feel——"

Patricia heard him up to that point, with a tranquillity which made him flatter himself he was making an impression at last. Then, quite suddenly, she looked up again, and said with brutal *brusquerie*:—

"Feel for your grandmother!"

It was impossible to go on after that. Giles opened the door hastily and she stalked out without another word to him.

Now she seemed very calm, very self-possessed, very much more at ease than her antagonist. Giles, feeling beaten, uncomfortable and worried, went back to the fire under the impression that this woman whom he had looked upon as a soft-voiced, round-faced baby, with the airs of a strong mind, indeed, but with none of its reality, was as hard as nails.

But he was wrong.

Excitement, indignation, her own proper pride had kept Patricia's head high and her voice steady while she was in the presence of the enemy. But once alone, she gave way, and instead of going straight to Lorna to consult her and tell her her own decision, she crept into her own little room adjoining her sister's, locked herself in, and began to cry.

What had she done? She began to feel that the position she was in was a very dreadful one, and that she was being hemmed in by all sorts of unexpected and undeserved difficulties and dangers.

As for Giles Wendover himself, he occupied a very small share of her thoughts. He was a cad, that most unspeakable and contemptible thing which in her schoolboy-like and simple code of honour was beneath contempt altogether. He did not count; he was "out of it."

But the fact that he had incurred her utter contempt and displeasure did not render him the less a danger, as she was aware. It was not his influence with her—which was nil—which she had to trouble

her head about, but what might be made of his presence near her by others.

Patricia was well aware that she had enemies who were ready to make the most of the slightest error in her conduct; and she began to ask herself what sort of use the Thornes would have made of such an incident as that which had just occurred, if it should have come to their ears.

That they would have used it against her, and that they would have done their utmost to bring about, by its means, a rupture between her and her husband, she felt nearly sure.

Slowly, as she lay on the little hotel bed in the dark, Patricia began to open her eyes more and more to the position in which she had placed herself by her wilful course since she left the furnished villa. She had definitely broken with her husband's people, who expressed displeasure in their short letters at the course she was adopting. And she knew by her husband's letters that she had displeased him.

On the other hand, her own people, though their society provided all the delights which she craved after her dreary stay alone at Barnsfield, did not afford her much protection of the kind a young wife needs. Her dear old mother, indeed, was always ready to have her darling Pat with her, but she indulged in comments on the absence of Chris which Patricia did not like, and she openly bemoaned her having married out of "the set."

Then there were her two sisters, with whom Patricia could do exactly as she liked as far as amusing herself was concerned. But neither Myra nor Lorna was the sort of companion Chris liked to have for his wife, and Patricia herself was surprised to find how some of their comments and criticisms of life jarred upon her, now that she had become accustomed to a different standard of thought in her husband.

And then Chris himself. How angry his last letters had shown him to be! And what a long time it seemed since she had got the last of them! Did he mean to punish her by leaving off writing?

Patricia sat up, feeling hot, guilty and wretched.

She lit her candles, took out her last letter from Chris, and read it again.

On the whole it was very unpleasant reading. Her husband was very angry with her for her repeated acts of self-willed defiance of his wishes; looked upon her departure for Paris with her sister as a sort of open revolt, and finished a very much shorter letter than usual by saying that he had no doubt his doings were of little interest to her, now that she was among her chosen friends, and enjoying herself after their fashion.

What would he say to the motor-car expedition? Patricia, sure of herself, had not till that moment seen this expedition in the right light. Now, however, that she had had personal experience of its dangers, it suddenly occurred to her to ask what Chris would say when the time came to tell him about it?

Not for one moment did she suggest to herself that



it would be possible to try to keep the incident from his knowledge altogether. Patricia was brave and honest by nature, and, while she had suppressed the fact of Giles Wendover's visits to her sister in her letters to her husband, it was only with a view to prevent his feeling jealous and anxious on her account, and with no idea but of ultimate and full confession.

Now she saw her mistake, saw that she ought on no account to have concealed the fact of Giles' presence in Paris. But as to the expedition on which they were at present engaged, Patricia told herself, with a real spasm of fright, that nothing she could urge would ever cause Chris to condone such a serious offence.

In all seriousness, Patricia began to think her husband might make this motor-car trip a reason for breaking with her altogether.

That one unpleasant incident had, of course, opened her eyes more fully than a dozen lectures would have done, and it was in a mood of the utmost depression, that, trembling and almost sick with vague alarm and disquiet, she unlocked the door of her own room and presented herself in her sister's.

Lady Gane was awake, and in the worst of tempers.

"I wish I'd never started on this beastly tour of yours, Pat," she moaned, as soon as her sister stole in, without a word, and stood quietly waiting to see whether she was awake.

"So do I," echoed Patricia most heartily.

Lady Gane was far too much absorbed in her own

grievances to notice the marked change in her sister's tone.

"I've got a splitting headache, and my skin is as rough as a crocodile's! And I've got a stiff neck too, and pains in my right shoulder—rheumatism, of course."

Patricia was quite pleased at this account. It would, she thought, cut short the agony of the tour, which had become detestable to her.

"Then we'll go on by train to-morrow," she said quickly, "and Giles Wendover can go on or go back as he likes."

Lorna perceived that something was amiss, and sat up in bed.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that he's a cad and a beast," replied Patricia, with simple candour, "and that—he tried to kiss me!"

She uttered these last words with ferocity, and drew herself up as she did so. Lady Gane lay down again.

"Is that all, child? Why, you might have known he would. If you were not prepared for that sort of thing, you shouldn't have come on this absurd expedition."

Patricia was furious.

"Is that all you have to say?" she asked. "I had expected you to take my part as you ought to do; and if you don't, I shall just go back to Paris by train alone to-morrow."

Lady Gane sat up, supported by her elbow, and re-

plied in a perfectly calm tone to her sister's rage and fury.

"Oh, no, of course you can't do that," she said; "you have to think of me."

"I'm quite ready to think of you, if you'll think of *me*," answered Patricia readily. "But that implies that you'll give the cad your opinion of him in strong terms."

"Couldn't you do that for yourself?" said Lady Gane languidly.

"Rather," replied Patricia with energy. "But that isn't the same thing. I want to be backed up. You're older than I am, and, besides, you're a widow, and you can say more, and more to the purpose."

Lady Gane laughed.

"You don't look to me as if you can have failed to say just what you thought, quite as well as I could have done," she replied. "And as for being older, and a widow, there's no such great difference in our ages as all that, and if I'm a widow, you couldn't well be more independent if Chris were dead, could you?"

Patricia shivered.

"Don't talk like that," she said. "You know very well I've no wish to be so very independent. I haven't been able to help myself."

"Oh, I am not reproaching you. I admire you for your pluck. But really, you know, you ought to have drawn the line at this motor-car trip! It was your doing, not mine."

"Well, I've had enough of it now."

"What! Not after your gru

"No. When I undertake a
it, and so must you. You can
I suppose?"

"I don't want ever to see hi
frowning.

"Well, you're making a gr
What has happened was boun
must be ready for it to happen
Giles is, and as he admired you b
you may be quite sure he will n
you're a grass widow."

"Don't call me that."

"Well, it's what you are, an
and men like him are bound to
It's a farce to pretend you don't

Patricia went back to her owi
very troubled feeling at her he
known, she told herself, that she
from Lorna, whose ideas were

before, since Lady Gane, in spite of her grumbling, refused absolutely to be put out by a fresh change of plan.

But Patricia, now thoroughly frightened and on her guard, was careful not to be left alone with Giles Wendover again, and the rest of the trip was uneventful, and even somewhat dull.

There was always the secret fear of what would happen, when Chris should learn about the trip, to keep Patricia's spirit down when for a moment they seemed inclined to rise. And when the motor-car got to Cannes it was with a sigh of relief that she felt that one terrible episode was over.

But on arrival at the hotel there was no letter from Chris in the packet which Richards delivered to the ladies.

Patricia felt her heart sink as she turned over those which were waiting for her, and found that there was not one from her husband among them.

CHAPTER XVI

LADY GANE did not mean to spend more than a few days at the hotel, as she proposed to take a villa for the season if she could find one which suited her. In the meantime, however, the sisters spent their time very pleasantly in shopping, an occupation they both loved, and in visiting such of their friends as were already in the town; but Patricia set her face steadfastly against more expeditions with Giles, and always made an excuse to retire when he called on them.

Lady Gane remonstrated sharply with her sister for this conduct, which she said was prudish and ridiculous.

Patricia did not argue the point, but continued to behave in the same way, avoiding Giles as much as possible, and speaking to him when it was absolutely necessary to do so with a tone and manner which reminded him that the incident of the motor tour was not forgotten.

In the meantime she received a letter from Chris and answered it. Her husband's tone was cool, and she reproached him with this, and told him that, if he had expected her to settle down in Barnsfield for the winter without him, he should have warned her of the fact beforehand.

He sent her some money, which she acknowledged gratefully, as her funds, though replenished by her



father before she left England, were running rather low.

Patricia had never been taught the value of money, but she was developing a very shrewd sense in that as in other things; and, though she indulged freely in purchases with her husband's present, she did not throw her money away, but laid it out rather well.

Lady Gane disliked much walking; it was part of the *rôle* of semi-invalid which she affected not to be able to walk—except when it pleased her to do so. Patricia, therefore, was left alone a good deal in the mornings, and she found it rather lonely.

She began to wish, intermittently, that she had not had to quarrel with Giles Wendover, who was staying, not at Cannes itself, but at Nice, and who came over dutifully twice or three times a week to see Lady Gane and to inquire if there was anything he could do for the ladies.

There was nothing, since Patricia refused point-blank to go to any more theatres or restaurants with him and her sister, as she had done in Paris; and Lady Gane, though she was rather bohemian in her habits, preferred not to be seen alone with Giles in a place where she was likely at any moment to meet people she knew.

Confinement to the house, however, made her cross and ill-tempered and poor Patricia suffered as well as Richards.

And then two people arrived on the scene whose presence was greatly resented by Patricia.

nished, but it was part of L
that nobody but herself had a
not take possession without
faction how much better her
was than that of the owner.

As she was an "invalid,"
fatigue, she got poor Patricia
hard work while she sat and
when all was settled to please
the draperies of the drawing-
complexion, and she sent her si
which was to be draped to hide
couches.

"Do be quick, there's a dear,'
tion as Patricia started, "for y
and Harry Mirfield are coming

"What, both of them?" gro
still and frowning severely.

"Yes, why not?"

"Oh, there's no reason again
like them



:e either of them," said Patricia, who was beginning be tired of her sister's caprices and selfishness. Harry Mirfield's an ass, and that old Jew is a terror."

"I don't know whether you think it good form to ll everybody an ass who doesn't happen to be an adirer of yours," retorted Lady Gane sharply. "Most ople think Harry rather a nice fellow. And as for r. Bernstein, I know lots of people, and so do you, ho are dying to have him to their dinners. It's quite compliment for him to like mine."

"Oh, I dare say he's a good judge of eating and rinking," said Patricia, who was nettled and out of atience with her sister.

Lady Gane grew very red. Rudolf Bernstein was ot, she was aware, the sort of man who would have een welcomed anywhere for the charm of his manners r the brilliancy of his conversation. He was indeed stout, thickset, heavy German Jew, without either ood looks, good manners, or an elementary sense of umour. But Lady Gane found him, or affected to nd him, charming, and encouraged his visits, and attered his vanity. For Rudolf Bernstein was rich, nd judicious management, adroit praise of his generity, of his good taste and of his preference for the est of everything, could be made to work wonders pon him when he was in clever hands.

Lady Gane's hands, when her own advantage was oncerned, were very clever indeed.

Harry Mirfield was also not the sort of man who ould have made a sensation in the world by his

she majestically condescended

There was no expense in fl
to be incurred when Harry
as he regarded her as a very
joiced in the waste of a good all
they were mutually helpful, a
comed with dignified readiness.

Lady Gane knew what she
couraged him.

It was unkind of Patricia to
two were coming on the same d
fact, nobody deplored this more
self.

It was by an awkward mischa
having been informed by her th
happened to fix the same aftern

"I hope you mean to be ci
sharply. "I don't care to hav
even if they are not geniuses."

"Oh, I shan't insult them. I

"Neither of them, of course."

"People think you are."

"Really, I can't help what they think. All widows are always supposed to be dying to marry again, but there's nothing further from the thoughts of those who want to enjoy themselves."

"Well, but both these men think you're going to marry them, don't they?"

"Harry may, certainly Mr. Bernstein doesn't. He's not a marrying man."

"Perhaps he's got a wife in Germany," suggested the amiable younger sister ingenuously.

"Perhaps," said Lady Gane, reddening in some displeasure, for indeed she had sometimes had doubts herself on this point.

As a matter of fact, Lady Gane would not have been averse to remarriage, if a suitor with the well-filled purse of a Rudolf Bernstein had come to woo; but the Jew was always careful to steer clear of all endeavours to lead him in the matrimonial direction, as Lady Gane knew to her distress.

"I think I shall go to see the Bayleys," said Patricia after a pause.

"You'll be bored to death. They're the most tiresome people I know."

Patricia smiled a little. The Bayleys had called the day before, and Lady Gane had been positively affectionate to all of them. Indeed it was her habit so to overdo her fondness for her friends—particularly her female friends—in their presence, that she was

almost bound to say the most disagreeable things possible behind their backs to keep the scales even.

The sisters had luncheon together, and then Patricia, true to her threat, went out by herself, leaving Lady Gane to receive her friends.

Patricia felt melancholy. Now that these two men had turned up, she guessed that they would never both of them be absent for long. And she hated both of them intensely. Harry Mirfield was silly and flippant, conceited and vain, and she could scarcely listen to her sister's flattery addressed to this insignificant little fellow without saying something cutting and bringing disgrace upon herself.

But even he was infinitely better than Rudolph Bernstein, whose deep-drawn, asthmatic breathing, slow movements, and heavy attempts to spoil ancient British jokes by giving them with a German accent, excited her to frenzy.

He used to pay her compliments, too, which disgusted her, and disgusted Lady Gane still more.

So the younger sister felt irritated and depressed as she sauntered out, walking slowly under a hot sun.

She had gone some distance before she found a seat where she could read in comfort, and then she took out the book she had brought, and, opening it, tried to fix her mind upon the words before her.

But she could not. It was always the one name "Chris" which she seemed to read, and before long she gave up the attempt to read. Turning the book upside down on her knee, she looked out at the hills

and at the sea, and wondered what was going to happen.

She had every day a stronger and ever stronger sense that something would occur to bring about a crisis in her affairs. The short and less frequent letters she received from her husband, her own uneasy sense that he would be displeased at half the things he had not yet heard about, the absence of news from Barnsfield in reply to her own letters to Millie—all combined to increase this feeling.

And thinking it all over as she sat by herself, Patricia at last uttered a long-drawn, shivering sigh.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Thorne?" asked a man's voice near her, very diffidently.

Patricia drew herself up with an instinctive frown. And the next moment Giles Wendover was standing humbly in front of her.

"Oh, please, please don't look so displeased! I didn't mean to intrude. I really didn't. If you only knew how awfully, awfully sorry, sorry and ashamed of myself I feel that I could ever, ever have offended you. If you would only believe, Mrs. Thorne, how anxious I am to make amends in any way you can suggest—indeed I think you wouldn't be so severe. Look here! People ought not to bear malice forever; even if a man has been to blame, his punishment ought not to last indefinitely, ought it? If only you would believe——"

He was so desperately humble, penitent, abject, that Patricia, in spite of herself, smiled a little.

He had chanced to come in her way at exactly the right moment to be forgiven; for she was at that moment feeling unutterably lonely and miserable and forlorn. She hailed with delight the notion of discreetly making it up with the guilty one.

"I have no wish to be unforgiving, Mr. Wendover," she said with quiet dignity which concealed some inward rejoicing. "I would rather, much rather—forget."

"Thank you a thousand times."

His whole face glowed with delight.

There, indeed, lay one of the dangers of this man's society, that he was always genuinely in earnest when he made love, or when he had to deal with a beautiful woman. So that at this moment the sudden change which came over his face, from acute distress and shame to the most intense joy and delight, was only the reflection of what he felt. He was like a schoolboy who had just been told that there are no lessons for the day. He was discreet, though, and he did not let his joy make him presumptuous.

There was a pause, then she said:—

"I suppose you can't tell me of a good book."

"Well, I don't go in much for reading, you know, and when I've read a notice or two of the latest book that's created a sensation I think I've done reading enough. Can't Lady Gane help you? I thought she was a great reader."

Instinctively Patricia frowned.

"Oh, she's too busy to attend to me and my



needs to-day," she said. "She's got some people to tea."

Giles looked interested.

"But you've not stayed in to have tea with them."

"No. They happen to be people I don't like," snapped Patricia.

"Oh! I see. By-the-bye, I met old Bernstein last night at Monte Carlo."

Patricia nodded.

"He's one of the people."

"Well, I don't wonder you don't like him. I always wonder how Lady Gane can stand him. His hands are enough to make you hate him."

"Yes," assented Patricia quickly. "And his way of laying down the law."

"How oddly chosen other people's friends always seem to be!" said Giles musingly. "There's another fellow who's a constant visitor, whom I can't stand. Fellow named Mirfield."

Patricia nodded.

"That's the other person who's there to-day," she said.

Giles uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"How clever of her to run them in double harness! Such an oddly ill-matched pair as they are! Only Lady Gane could do it!"

"It won't be very pleasant for me," said Patricia, "to have one or other of them about all day long! I think I shall go back to England."

Giles hesitated.

"I suppose there's nothing I could do?" he said humbly. "But I'm afraid you'd think me as bad as they!"

"Oh, no, I shouldn't," retorted Patricia with vivacity. "When I do a thing it's not by halves, and, now I've forgotten, I shall be very glad to have you to talk to about old times and my husband, and the things I like. You see these two horrors—I mean Lorna's friends—don't know any of my friends, and so at best talking to them is very dull."

"By Jove, yes! Dullest thing in the world for you! Well, you've only got to tell me anything I can do, and I shall be only too delighted."

"Thanks awfully."

There was a pause. The sun was going down, and already the air was growing cold with the sudden chilliness of the south.

"Might I suggest," said Giles gently, "that you ought to be moving soon? You're not very warmly clad, and when the sun goes down here it gets jolly cold at once."

"Yes," said Patricia, springing to her feet. "I'd forgotten."

She was shivering already.

"You want a brisk walk," said he, "and let me lend you my muffler. I always carry one in my pocket."

He took out a smart white silk muffler and there was a slight discussion between them, she wanting him to keep it, he insisting that she should wear it.



"Wouldn't Chris be angry if you were not to take care of yourself?" said he shrewdly.

The mention of her husband's name, thus cleverly introduced, melted Patricia at once.

"Oh!" she said, with a little, half-hysterical laugh, "yes, I suppose he would."

And she accepted the muffler without further protest.

Giles took her to within a few yards of the villa, and then said: "Do you think they'll be gone yet—both of them?"

Patricia paused in dismay.

"It doesn't matter if they're not," she said sharply. "I shall go straight to my room."

"Without your tea? No. Come with me into the town and we'll have something nice. You don't mind, do you? Come, you said I was forgiven!"

Conscious that she was again doing something which she had better have left undone, Patricia yet yielded to the temptation of having some one to talk to, some one who would not be actively objectionable like Rudolf Bernstein, or actively irritating like Harry Mirfield, or purely and entirely disagreeable as Lady Gane certainly would be after the strain of entertaining at the same time two people whom she preferred to keep apart.

So Giles had his own way and took her into the town, and they had a lovely tea, and Patricia, whom a little pleasant excitement always rendered riotously happy, laughed, and chatted, and enjoyed herself as she had not done for some time.

Patricia's beauty was so remarkable that wherever she went she was bound to excite attention. It was therefore no new thing for her to attract the eyes of all the people who sat near her, and Giles noted, not without pride in his companion, the number of admiring glances which were cast in her direction.

All at once, as he looked round, Patricia saw the look on his face change to one of surprise.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing, nothing."

He had diverted his gaze from the object which had attracted him. But Patricia saw that he had noticed something which caused him more than astonishment, and she looked round, as he had done.

She was quick then to discover the cause of his amazement.

At a table not far from them a man was seated, in whom she recognised the person who had looked in through the half-open door of the country inn when Giles attempted to kiss her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE discovery that her movements were being spied upon, for that was the interpretation Patricia at once put upon the presence of the man she had seen at the inn, frightened the young wife and at once reduced her from gaiety to gloom.

Giles, however, affected to think nothing of what he had seen, and began to talk to her in a tone as near the old one as he could muster.

But even he had clearly been disconcerted by the sight of the face he too remembered to have seen at the inn, and it was in vain that he tried to laugh and chatter as before.

Patricia only affected to listen, she made no answer to what he said. Then, quite suddenly, she turned to look at the man again.

Evidently he was aware that he had been observed, and he had now turned his back towards them and was reading a paper.

Patricia turned quickly to Giles.

"Go and find out who he is," she said.

"Why? Who is he? Have you seen him before?" asked Giles in affected innocence.

Patricia cut him very short.

"Of course I have, and so have you," she answered. "He was at the Hôtel de France when we stopped

there. And you know it, for you saw him, you must have seen him."

"I suppose," said Giles, trying to speak carelessly, "he's some wretched fellow who's dared to lose his head about you, and that he's——"

"He's done what?" asked Patricia sharply.

"Oh, I was going to suggest that he'd followed you, but of course that's not possible."

She looked round furtively. The man's back was still turned.

"It is possible though!" she said in a hoarse whisper. "And he has followed me. He's spying upon me, I know. I want you to go up to him, and speak to him, and try to find out, if you can, whether he's English. I know he is though, and I believe he's—he's——"

She could not finish, but Giles understood. Aware that there was danger ahead, he obeyed her wish, and waiting until the man rose to go out, followed and addressed him.

When he came back to Patricia he was looking rather disturbed.

"Yes, the fellow's English right enough," he said. "I asked him what he was doing here, and he pretended not to understand what I meant. But I believe you're right, and that he's—he's some sort of spy."

"I was sure of it," said Patricia.

She was looking now, not so much alarmed as angry and obstinate.

"Isn't it disgusting?" she asked fiercely.



Giles looked at her askance.

"Surely you don't think your husband——"

Patricia threw at him a glance of scorn.

"My husband! No. But his people, his wretched, horrible relations, are capable of that, of anything."

"Surely not!"

"Yes, they are. His father is determined to keep us apart if he can. It was he who sent Chris to Russia. I didn't understand then, as I do now, why he did it, but now I feel quite sure. And it is he who has sent this man to watch me. Well, he shall have something to report for his trouble. Giles, you shall take me to the Casino to-night."

Her eyes were flashing, her breath was coming fast. Though not the most chivalrous of mortals, and by no means incapable of taking advantage of a woman's difficulties, Giles had the grace to warn her.

"You mustn't do that," he said gently. "At least, you mustn't until you have thought things over and made sure of what you think."

Patricia rose to her feet, angry and determined.

"Very well. If you won't take me, I'll get Harry Mirfield to, or old Bernstein. I'm not going to be persecuted in this way. And I'm not going to let them think I am ashamed of what I do."

"No, no, of course not, and I'll take you to the Casino or anywhere you please, of course. But not to-night. You must speak to Lorna first——"

"Lorna!"

The amount of contempt which Patricia threw into

her tone showed plainly how much reliance she felt she could place in the support and advice of Lady Gane.

"Well, she's better than nothing. At any rate she's another woman," was all Giles could urge.

"She's of no use in an emergency. I've found that out before," said Patricia, smarting under the remembrance of her elder sister's treatment at the Hôtel de France.

"Very likely you're wrong, you know. There are heaps of Englishmen here, and what is there for him to find out?"

But she was not satisfied, and after maintaining almost absolute silence on the way home, she bade goodbye to Giles at the door of the villa, after making an appointment, defiantly, with him for the following day.

As she expected, she found Lady Gane very cross and disagreeable. Her guests had gone, and she was resting after a trying time with them. She received her younger sister with a frown.

"Where have you been all this time? With the Bayleys?"

"No! Giles took me to tea."

"Giles! Have you made it up then?"

Patricia frowned.

"What else was there to do? He's promised to—to be all right in the future."

"So he will, of course, till the next time."

Patricia restrained herself from uttering the words which rose to her lips. She remembered that she was

in real need of advice and help, and perhaps even that of her sister was better than nothing.

"I want to tell you something," she said.

Lady Gane, who was lying back with closed eyes on the specially draped sofa, did not look at her sister.

"Well?" she said wearily, as she took up her smelling-salts.

"I've been followed."

"Followed. What do you mean?"

"There was a man where we had tea, watching me and Giles. And I recognised him. He was at the Hôtel de France. Now how should the same man be here, ever so far away, watching me as I saw him watching me then, unless he were spying upon me?"

Lady Gane laughed quite cheerfully.

"My dear Patricia," she said languidly, "I could have told you that. There was a man spying upon us —upon you, I suppose—when we were in Paris."

"And you never told me?" said Patricia angrily.

"What would have been the use? We weren't doing anything that mattered, until that silly motor journey. And if I'd told you about it then, it wouldn't have made any difference, except, perhaps, to make you more daring, more venturesome. I know what you are!"

Patricia sat down, feeling indeed as if she could not stand under this blow. For a blow it was to find that her own sister had known of the espionage to which she was being subjected without giving her a word of warning!

Of course it was possible that Lorna was only pretending, in order to give herself a greater reputation for acuteness than she had any right to. But Patricia could not be sure of this, and it seemed to her at the moment that she was without a friend in the world.

And her heart rose in passionate rebellion against the husband who had left her to do battle with her difficulties all by herself. She told herself that he had no right to abandon her for so long, and that, if he cared for her as he professed to do, he should have left his work, everything, rather than expose his wife to difficulties which his own letters showed that he fully appreciated.

However, she was not going to break down before Lorna, whose sympathy was not likely to be either deep or genuine. She sat for a few moments considering her position in silence, and then she said quietly:—

"I shall go back to England."

Lady Gane was annoyed at this speech.

"Where will you go to?" she asked, opening her eyes, and looking rather anxiously at her sister, whose presence with her she found desirable and even necessary.

"To—to Mamma, I suppose."

Lorna shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, well, if you like to have the sort of things said that do get said when a young married woman goes back to her father's house almost at once after her marriage, I suppose I shall have to put up with it. But it's rough on me, very rough, since I certainly

shouldn't have come out here all by myself; besides, I'm not in a proper state of health to be left here by myself."

Patricia laughed incredulously.

"You're always well enough to do anything you want to do," she said drily. "I suppose you've arranged some restaurant dinners already with those two men!"

"I wish you wouldn't talk in that unpleasant way, as if there were anything improper about my friends! I have made no appointments that I shall keep unless you will go with me. I am quite at your mercy in the matter."

Patricia hesitated. She did not want to have to return to England, until her husband came back. She did not care to face any more of her relations and friends until she knew exactly, as she expressed it in her own mind, "what was going to happen." For that some crisis in her fortunes was approaching she felt sure.

"Don't you see how difficult it is for me, Lorna?" she asked after a long pause, in quite a subdued voice, "to know just what to do? If I go back to England, I can only go to Mamma, as Barnsfield is out of the question—I simply won't go back there again, whatever happens. It isn't fair to ask me, and—and it wasn't fair ever to expect me to live there."

This was the first time Patricia had ever expressed herself so strongly on the subject of her husband's treatment. Hitherto, indeed, she had upheld his cause

quite fiercely whenever Chris was attacked, as was pretty frequently the case, by one or other of the members of her family. Now, however, it seemed as if the end of her patience had come. Chris had ceased to be loving, or what she regarded as loving in his letters, and had become angry and sarcastic, and the young wife felt rebellion rising in her heart, at last.

It had indeed risen in her conduct long ago, but that was not really such a vital matter.

Lady Gane began to feel some feeble interest in the matter, and half sat up.

"Of course it wasn't fair," she said. "Everybody always said so. It was you, Pat, who so obstinately held out that your hero and paragon of a husband couldn't do wrong. Every one but you has thought him the meanest of wretches to leave you so long on no matter what pretext; and if you want my opinion, it is that he and his old father, whom you think so badly of, are as like as two peas in a pod."

Patricia was trembling. Those unpleasant suggestions of a comparison between her husband and his father had indeed occurred to her before.

"Don't," she said feebly. "Don't, Lorna. You wouldn't if you knew how horribly frightened—and —and alone it all makes me feel."

"Well, I don't want to say nasty things. On the contrary, I'm anxious to help you. But you know, Pat, you're difficult to help. You're so awfully self-willed."

"Yes, I know," wailed poor Patricia, with a tear



forcing its way down her pretty cheek. "But that's not such a very awful sin, and I'm treated as if I'd played football with the whole decalogue."

"There, there, don't cry, and we'll go somewhere to-morrow and enjoy ourselves, and forget all about everybody but just ourselves," suggested Lady Gane soothingly.

This was evading the point rather than dealing with it, but Patricia, on mature consideration, was forced to the conclusion that it would be better to stay with her sister and keep as quiet as she could till matters came to a head with the Thornes, than to return to England and face more trouble by going about with Myra in town, where there were more people to make comments both on her situation and her actions.

In the meantime she sat down that night and wrote an earnest letter, in the nature of an appeal, to her husband.

"My Dear Chris," she began,

"I am afraid you are very angry with me for not having given up all my friends and relations for yours, and I must tell you frankly that I think you have not been as kind to me as you ought. I know I am self-willed; but you knew all about me before you married me, and you would have me, in spite of everything and everybody.

"Now you are punishing me for having gone back to my own people, by writing fewer letters, and letters which are not at all kind.

"I wish you had never gone to Russia. I know it was I who persuaded you to go, and I believe now that your father did not mean you to come back for a long time, and that he was delighted when I pressed you to go. But I think, when you found out how long you were to stay over there, you should have insisted upon a holiday to come back and settle me somewhere. As it was, I could not go on living at Barnsfield, either by myself or with your people, whom I hate—all but Millie, who is a dear, or who would be if they'd let her.

"I had to go back to my own friends, and it is not fair of you to find fault with them, or with my going back to them. I never pretended I was going to give them up, or that I thought there was anything wrong with them.

"I know you were angry with me for going away with Myra, then with going to my father's and then with my going to Paris. Of course you are angrier still at my coming to the Riviera, and, equally of course, at my meeting some of my old friends here. I confess I have not even told you the names of all the friends I have met here and at Paris, because I thought it would worry you to feel that I had slipped back into the old set again.

"Now I know that your people have set spies on me, and I warn you that, if they continue to do so, I shall just do something on purpose to shock them. Of course I shan't do anything really dreadful, but I am

ot going to be treated unfairly, and spying is an un-air thing.

"I feel rather guilty in writing like this, as it will ause you pain. But just ask yourself whether I have een properly treated by any of your people *or even y you!* Your last letters have not been at all kind. It s your own fault if I am beginning to feel differently owards you. *I hope you will soon come back.*

"Your *loving* wife,

"PATRICIA."

Patricia slipped out of the house, late as it was, to ost this letter herself, and she had not gone many teps when she met Giles Wendover, who cried: 'Hallo!" when he saw her advancing towards him in he darkness.

"Hallo!" replied Pat. "What are *you* doing here?"

"I—I don't exactly know," replied Giles, confused. 'At least, I had a vague idea of calling, if it wasn't oo late, to ask Lady Gane whether you and she would go somewhere with me to-morrow, say to Monte Carlo or Nice, or further afield if you like."

He was shy, shamefaced, almost, as it seemed, afraid to make the offer.

But Patricia welcomed it. She felt restless, excited, rebellious. She would like to do something rather dreadful, and to take another trip with Giles Wendover in his car answered sufficiently to that descrip-ion.

"I'll ask her," said she. "I'll tell Lorna what you propose, and we'll leave it to her to say yes or no."

This was a convenient way out of the difficulty, but Giles felt that she was anxious to go.

"It really seems a pity to lose weather as good as this is for the time of year," he went on, concealing his delight at her conciliatory attitude.

"And it will keep off Harry Mirfield and old Bernstein," added Patricia simply.

"I'm afraid you've been worrying yourself rather about what happened this afternoon," said he in a low voice. "That was the real reason why I wanted to call, to know what Lady Gane thought."

Patricia shrugged her shoulders.

"You might have known without inquiring," said she. "Lorna never thinks twice about anything but what concerns herself."

"No, I'm afraid she doesn't. So that you're left very much to yourself."

His tone was so kind, so gravely sympathetic, that poor Patricia, wounded and troubled in mind, could not but find his conversation soothing. They were walking along, side by side, and not hurrying themselves.

"You were going to post a letter? Shall I do it for you?"

She shook her head.

"No, thanks. It's to Chris, and I always post his letters myself. I don't know, though, that he would appreciate the compliment."



Her tone was unconsciously a little piteous, a little sad. Giles was careful not to say anything rash. He heaved a sigh which was discreet and sympathetic, without being obtrusive or ostentatiously pitying.

"So you'll come to-morrow and ask her!" she said, stopping abruptly, and holding out her hand.

"I shall be delighted, more than delighted," said Giles, as he took her hand, and gave it a slight but warm pressure, just not long enough to risk exciting her displeasure.

He must be on his guard now.

Patricia, as she went back into the villa, gave a searching look round in all directions, to see whether the spy were still on the watch in the neighbourhood.

But she saw nothing, and glided back into the drawing room without any further adventure to watch Lady Gane play patience.

CHAPTER XVIII

GRADUALLY but surely it came about during the next few days that Giles Wendover became to Patricia her one friend and confidant.

She tried hard to avoid this, and indeed he did not seem to try to bring it about. But it was inevitable.

For in the first place, the arrival at Cannes of Harry Mirfield and Rudolf Bernstein was bound to make a great difference to poor Patricia.

Lady Gane was always either receiving them or lunching or dining out with one or the other of them; and on those occasions, in order to get a little party, she had to invite a second man on Patricia's account. She sometimes asked one friend, and sometimes another; but there was no one in the neighbourhood so nice or so old in acquaintance as Giles, and therefore it generally came about, in spite of Patricia's occasional faint objections, that he made the fourth.

Nothing could have exceeded his discretion, or that of Patricia herself. Not one word to which Christopher himself could have taken objections ever passed his lips, still less hers; but the fact remained that they became again what they had been in the old days at the Heronry, "pals," as Patricia herself would have called it, and that they got on together better than either of them did with any one else.

Lady Gane devoted herself with equal zest to the

immature Harry or to the over-mature Bernstein. Both were bores of the first water, and required a great deal of management and tact to be even inoffensive. But Lady Gane was used to choosing her friends, not so much for what they were as for what they had; not so much for the pleasure of their society as for other pleasures which she could obtain through their means. And both these men, with their flowers and bonbons, their dinners and luncheons, fulfilled the requirements she demanded in a friend.

It was quite natural that, with her sister and one of these men for companions, Patricia should find the society of Giles Wendover a refreshing change. She did not even apologise to herself for enjoying it, since there seemed no reason why she should not.

There was even already a spice of devil-may-care defiance of convention about Patricia's feeling for her old sweetheart, for she said to herself with sullen irritation that whatever she did would be spied upon, reported, and distorted, so that there was no need for her to set a watch on herself. She would certainly have to face something unpleasant in the nature of an accusation by and by, and in the meantime she would do as she pleased, not acting in any way so as to cause serious scandal, but not trying, on the other hand, to avoid cause for gossip.

They had plenty of other friends in Cannes and the neighbourhood, so that the presence of Giles Wendover at the villa excited very little more remark than it had done at the Paris flat. But still there was bound to be

some gossip about the sisters and their admirers, and Patricia did not escape the tongues altogether, though perhaps she was treated more gently than was Lady Gane.

And in the meantime Patricia had grave cause for uneasiness in the fact that a whole week passed without her getting a letter from her husband at all.

This was the first time she had had to wait so long, and she wondered what it meant. And at last, unable to bear the suspense, she telegraphed to Millie Thorne, asking her whether they had heard from Chris, and whether any accident had befallen him.

She wrote another letter to her husband, too, but as he was travelling about she knew that he was without direct news of her for days together, and that he often found her letters waiting for him two at a time.

She got no reply to her telegram, but in three days she got a letter from Millie, written in an almost hysterical style, without any punctuation but dashes, and with one word in three deeply underlined.

Her sister-in-law wrote that she had received the telegram, but had been forbidden to answer it, and that she was writing this letter against strict orders. She said that they had heard—she did not know exactly how, but the news had filtered through somehow—that Patricia was not behaving as Christopher would have liked her to behave during his absence, and that she had been seen in the society of people of whom he did not approve. Millie implored Patricia, if this were so, to change her conduct at once, or something dreadful

would be sure to happen when Christopher should learn the truth.

She added that she herself was quite sure that all the things said about her sister-in-law were untrue, and that she was true and good, as Christopher believed her to be. But she added that Patricia had made enemies, about whom she could not say more than this, that they would not believe the best, but the worst, and that whatever they thought, they would repeat to Christopher, and that, if they did, she thought he would go mad.

She ended with her love to Patricia, and begged her not to say anything about the letter, as there would be a "scene" at home if it were known that she had written.

This letter, written with the best intentions in the world, roused in Patricia the most active feelings of revolt she had as yet experienced.

Of course she knew that the "enemies" so discreetly referred to were the two elder Thornes, and especially old Mr. Thorne.

Now the suspicion she had from the first entertained with regard to his intention of sowing dissension between his son and her were fully confirmed, and her first impulse on reading poor Millie's well-meant warning was to do something more openly defiant of convention than ever, in order to bring about the crisis she felt to be fast approaching.

What that crisis could be she only vaguely felt. Perhaps Chris was on his way to the Riviera; that

was what she devoutly hoped, and perhaps he would come in such an angry and prejudiced condition that she would have a difficulty in making him listen to reason, and even in making him see that she had done nothing very wrong or disgraceful.

If this thought had occurred to Patricia soon after his going away, she would not have felt it to be a terrible possibility.

Relying on her own influence, on her own love for her husband, she would have been sure that a few loving words, a few caresses, added to a plain statement and a straightforward denial of all accusations of a serious kind, would have set matters right.

But it was inevitable that the circumstances of his departure, the repeated putting off of his return, her own actions, and the known disapproval of the Thorne family, together with the active criticisms of her own relations and friends, should have worked their due effect upon the young wife. So that now, instead of counting confidently on her powers of persuasion, or even on her husband's love, she trembled, and asked herself whether it would really come to this, that he would refuse to accept her version of her conduct, or, hearing it, should think it ground enough for a real and permanent breach.

The suggestion which had indeed occurred to her spontaneously before it was uttered by Lady Gane, that Chris was but a chip off the old block, and that he might turn out to be as hard and harsh as his own father, worried, beset her.

In that case she felt that her doom was sealed.

Indeed a sense of the approaching end of all things was beginning to get such a firm hold upon Patricia that she grew reckless, and, although she did not give Giles Wendover any opportunity for presuming on her forgiveness, she was kinder to him than she would have been but for Millie's letter, and more ready to accept his companionship on the expeditions which they took with Lady Gane and one or another of her train of admirers.

Patricia and Lady Gane, together with Harry Mirfield and Giles had gone for a long drive one afternoon in Wendover's motor-car, and returned to the villa together to dine before going on to the Casino for the evening.

Lady Gane's Italian man-servant met the ladies as they descended from the car with the news that a gentleman had been there during their absence, and had inquired for Mrs. Christopher Thorne.

Patricia, half startled, half delighted, asked eagerly what name the gentleman had given.

She was told that he had left none. And he had given no message, but he had asked the most minute particulars about the drive Mrs. Thorne had taken, and the names of the people who went with her.

Patricia blushed and trembled, and asked then what he was like.

Was he a tall, young, handsome man—this gentleman?

The servant answered in the negative. He was not

very tall, and he was not young, though he was not ill-looking. He had nearly white hair and beard.

She drew back without another question.

"It's old Mr. Thorne," she said to her sister in a low voice.

Giles Wendover caught the words, and Lady Gane was much startled.

"Oh, Pat, what shall we do? Will he make a scene? What has he come for? We had better send the men away!" she said hurriedly, in great agitation and annoyance.

Patricia was much calmer than her sister as she answered:—

"No. We will carry out our programme. We will alter nothing. We will send no one away. What harm is there in it? No, no, I will have nothing changed—nothing. We will dine here, go on to the Casino, just as we'd arranged to do."

Lady Gane was in such a state of distress that she consulted Giles, unable to rely entirely on her own judgment, and mistrusting that of her young sister.

But Giles agreed with Patricia.

"Better, much better," he said, "to go on just as usual, and to brave it out. After all, what has anybody done?"

"No, that's true. But you don't know what he will have heard!"

"No matter what he has heard, it would only look suspicious if we were suddenly to change our plans. What have we to worry ourselves about? Patricia is

with you, and that ought to be enough for anybody."

"It won't be," said Lady Gane in despair.

However, she was persuaded by the others to adhere to the arrangement already made, and they all sat down to dinner together, three of the four feeling as if a sword were suspended over their heads.

Harry Mirfield was only vaguely aware that something unpleasant was expected to happen, but he was too foolish to be discreet, and from time to time he would look round at the faces of his companions, and listen to every sound outside the room, adding to the general embarrassment by his undisguised curiosity and by the questions he asked Lady Gane, which she had tactfully to parry.

Dinner was got through without disturbance, and then came again the question whether they should stay at home, where they were comparatively safe, or whether they should brave danger and go, as originally proposed, to the Casino.

Patricia it was who insisted that this part of the programme also should be rigidly adhered to.

"The only thing we could do to be ashamed of," she said calmly, "would be to alter our plans because of his coming. Why should we?"

So it was decided that they should go on together and moreover that they should go in Giles's motor-car.

It was an exciting and a miserable evening. Lady Gane insisted upon keeping Patricia with her, and in

letting the two men follow them together, hoping against hope, as Patricia felt, that if old Mr. Thorne should have followed them, he would not know who Giles was, and that, at any rate, he would not see Patricia with him.

But it was the self-willed and daring Patricia herself who defeated this little plan. She insisted upon speaking to Giles more often than to any one else, and they could all see, by the fierce glitter in her eyes, that she meant to defy her persecutor if she should come face to face with him.

She did.

Before they had been very long in the rooms, the party descried a man whom they all knew at once, from Patricia's description, to be the father of Christopher Thorne.

The old man was very quiet, very watchful, very keen of eye and quiet of step.

He was wearing evening clothes of antiquated pattern, and he wore an ancient and massive gold watch-chain which added to his provincial look.

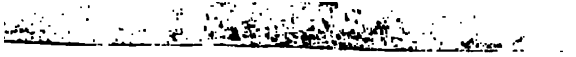
He caught sight of the party at once, and then set about concealing himself from them, and deliberately playing the spy.

Patricia noted this, and the fierce look in her eyes grew fiercer still.

Suddenly detaching herself from Lady Gane, she took Giles's arm, and, in spite of his entreaty to her to be careful, his warning that she was being watched, she insisted upon talking and laughing with him, and



"HER FATHER-IN-LAW, IS WATCHING HER AS A CAT WATCHES A MO







in treating him with far more open and easy familiarity than she had ever shown to him before.

Giles was disturbed and uneasy, Lady Gane was beside herself with worry and distress. She confided her woes to Harry Mirfield, with a wail of sympathy for herself and her own difficulties.

"Imagine! My absurd sister is doing this, flirting with Giles Wendover, on purpose to irritate her father-in-law, who is watching her as a cat watches a mouse! There'll be a most shocking scandal. Do pray let us be ready to get away at the first sign of a coming storm!"

But Patricia refused to go home to the villa, refused to do anything discreet or sensible, and continued to talk and laugh with Giles, with her face strangely set and almost hard, and her blue eyes flashing.

She was indeed at a high pitch of anger and irritation at this personal espionage on the part of the old man whom she hated and mistrusted. She did not fear an open scandal, what her sister called a "scene," being sure that old Mr. Thorne, so far from being likely to be carried away by his feelings, was craftily bent on seeing all that he could see, and hearing all that he could hear, before he ventured upon a personal encounter.

Well, he should see and hear enough to content him. No warnings from her sister or even from Giles himself sufficed to make her change her plan, which was to outrage, to annoy, to enrage the mean old man who had set spies upon her during his son's absence, and who thought he was going to convict her of improper con-

duct upon the gratifying evidence of his own jaundiced eyes.

Giles at last ventured to take her seriously to task for her rashness.

"What's the use of behaving like this?" he said. "The old man is watching you, and you know it, and he will tell your husband all sorts of tales that will only make mischief."

"Yes, that's what he will do, and what I want him to do," replied Patricia quickly and passionately. "Then that will bring Chris back to me, if he hasn't deserted me altogether by his father's orders."

"Great Heavens, Pat, you don't mean what you say!"

"I hope it isn't true," retorted she recklessly, with the fire still burning in her blue eyes, "but what am I to think? I hear nothing. And all I see is not himself but his father, whose mind has been poisoned against me from the first, and who means to poison his son's if he can."

"But what's your object in exasperating him? You are behaving to-night in a way that anybody might think strange, laughing so much and talking so fast, and, while you are being spied upon, it's madness!"

Nothing, however, would check her in the line of conduct she had deliberately laid down for herself. She knew very well that the old man was treasuring up every slightest scrap of suspicious matter there was in her conduct or in the evidence of the spy he had set to watch her, and she knew that he would have enough



to report upon most damagingly, and to bring back her husband, unless he had indeed thrown her over altogether.

So she refused to go home earlier than usual, and when she did she insisted upon sitting by Giles in the car.

When they got to the villa and Giles would have retired with Harry Mirfield, Patricia detained him, and kept him talking in the drawing-room while Lady Gane, irritated and anxious, scolded and reproached her from the sofa.

And then they heard steps across the hall, and Patricia, her eyes still blazing, rose quickly from the chair on which she was sitting.

She had recognised the voice of old Mr. Thorne, hard and nasal, speaking to the servant. Giles would have escaped by the French window, but she seized him by the arm, and held him fast while the door was thrown open and the old Yorkshireman was shown in.

"Ah!" cried Patricia, as she came forward at once to meet him, but without holding out her hand. "How do you do, Mr. Thorne? I hope you heard plenty of interesting things from the detective you set to spy upon me in Paris, and who followed me here."

The old man, who was totally unprepared for this attack, thinking, as he did, that he had come to overwhelm her with his accusations, stammered and stuttered, being indeed somewhat taken aback by the atmosphere of luxury and comfort which surrounded the two ladies.

Patricia went on pitilessly:—

"You do not know my sister, I believe? Lady Gane, Mr. Christopher Thorne, senior."

Lorna bowed slightly but without speaking, and the old man, disconcerted, made her an awkward bend. Patricia went on mercilessly:—

"And this, Mr. Thorne, is Mr. Giles Wendover, my old sweetheart before I married your son. He has been most kind to my sister and me, most kind, while your son has been absent on your lengthy business in Russia. Mr. Wendover has put his motor-car at our disposal in the sweetest manner, and we are very grateful to him, especially I. For I suppose it was chiefly on my account that you did it, wasn't it, Giles?"

"Oh, I was delighted—only too pleased," stammered poor Giles, more uncomfortable than he had ever been in his life before.

Mr. Thorne, absolutely disconcerted by this reception, bowed to Giles and suddenly turned to the door muttering something about calling again in the morning.

Patricia sprang across the room and stood a moment before him as he went out:—

"And now, Mr. Thorne, write to Chris, tell him what you've heard and what you've seen—and—tell him also——" she hissed out the last words with startling distinctness— "what lies about me you please."



CHAPTER XIX

NOW although Patricia, by her passion and wilful impetuosity, had for the moment made so great an impression upon her father-in-law as to drive the power of speech from him, and to make it appear as if she were the victor in the encounter between them, she was not to be allowed to come out of the fray so easily as she imagined.

Upon receiving this challenge from his son's young wife, the old Yorkshireman stopped, and frowning heavily and standing in an attitude as little as possible like that of a vanquished foe, said in a surly tone:—

"Wait a moment. What do you mean by lies? What lies do you suppose I should tell about you, and why should I tell them?"

It was Patricia's turn now to be disconcerted, and she paused.

Only for a moment, though. Before Lady Gane could intervene, as Giles signed to her to do, the young wife had recovered herself and made her own answer:—

"You are anxious to make mischief between me and Chris. You can't deny it. And you don't care what means you use. Nobody who meant to act fairly would have engaged a detective to spy upon my movements,

when I've always been quite open and straightforward to you and to everybody."

"You have not," replied the Yorkshireman flatly. "I'll be bound you've said nothing to Chris about this young man here."

Patricia hesitated, and the colour left her cheeks a little. Lady Gane began to speak, and Giles came forward, ready with words on his own behalf and on that of Patricia; but the interference of the outsiders was not needed. Patricia, after only a very short pause, said:—

"I've told him frankly that I'm with a lot of my old friends, though it's quite true I haven't given him any names. There's no need, when you take so much trouble to supply him with any information which I may fail to give."

The old man gave a sort of mocking laugh, short, dry, hard, mirthless.

"You've said nothing to him, I'll be bound, about your motor-car journey with this gentleman from Paris here."

"My sister, Lady Gane, was with me," retorted Patricia.

"Yes, I know that, but she doesn't seem to have looked after you very well, if what has been reported to me is true."

Patricia gave a cry of triumph.

"Reported to you! You admit then that you employed a spy, a detective?"

Old Mr. Thorne only hesitated for one moment,

and then, planting his feet more firmly, he answered:—

"Why should I not? I'm the best judge of the means I use. When I suspected that my son's wife was not conducting herself as she ought to do, and when I found out that she was not giving a faithful account of her doings——"

"Pray how did you know that—before you set a detective to work?" asked Patricia.

Again her unexpected quickness disconcerted him. He hesitated, and she laughed derisively.

"You knew nothing—you only guessed. And your guesses were not likely to be anything but unfavourable to me. Oh, I quite understand your motives and the actions they have led to, Mr. Thorne, and I think that, when you and I confront Chris together, it will be you, and not I, who will have to blush for shame—if you can blush!"

Totally unaccustomed to contradiction or opposition of any sort, always an autocrat in his home and in his office, old Christopher Thorne was almost paralysed for the second time by his daughter-in-law's vehement and passionate attack.

There was a certain shrewdness, too, in her arguments which did not at all fulfil the expectations he had formed of his reception. He had supposed she would be overwhelmed at the sight of him, that she would beg for forgiveness, implore him to interfere on her behalf with his son, and promise to behave better in future.

Instead of that, she openly defied him, and e stated plainly her opinion that young Christopher wc find more to blame in his father's conduct than in wife's.

He took refuge in a pretence of utter contempt her and her outbursts.

Waving his hand, he said coldly, when he had a few minutes to recover from the shock of her fiant outburst:—

"You had better take time to reflect on what are saying—and you will see then that you hav a leg to stand on. My son would never forgive s conduct as yours in his wife, and any means I ı have taken to open his eyes to the sort of woı he's married were justified, quite justified. I've l perfectly open with you. I came here to-day to you."

"Yes, in the hope that you could find out someth really serious about me. But you have failed, you will always fail. And I shall make Chris bel that. He will know, and understand."

She was breaking down at last, and though she safely to the end of her speech, by the time the word was uttered she was trembling violently : had to hold on to the back of a chair for s port.

Old Christopher Thorne looked at her steadily, v a very ugly expression in his hard eyes.

"I've not failed. I never do fail," he said shoı Then he turned to Lady Gane, and saying in the s

abrupt manner: "I shall call here again to-morrow, madam," he went out of the house without another word to his daughter-in-law.

When he had gone, Patricia gave way altogether, as was to be expected, and throwing herself down on a sofa, cried as if her heart would break.

Giles would have left her with her sister; but Lady Gane, thinking that a general consultation would be better than a *tête-à-tête* for them to come to a decision as to what was to be done, made him stay until Patricia had conquered her first outburst of emotion, and could sit up and speak.

Then, however, Lady Gane took advantage of her comparative calmness only to scold her.

"Now see what you've done for yourself, with your headstrong ways," she said. "You ought to have been gentle, humble, persuasive, and to have appeared shocked at his suspicions. Really, from the way you spoke and behaved, I think he was justified in his opinion of you."

Patricia shook her head.

"Look here," she said quietly, "it's of no use to lecture me about this, because I know the old beast and you don't. He's always hated me and it was he who sent Chris to Russia and it's he who's keeping him there. It wouldn't have mattered how I behaved, he would have found out some cause for displeasure against me; and if he could have found out nothing, he would have invented something. Now what can he do?"

"He can tell your husband quite enough to make him angry," said Lady Gane sharply.

Her sister laughed.

"Oh, yes. But he hopes he has done more than that. He has come here in the hope of exasperating me altogether. I know him, and I know his methods. And I'm quite sure of this, that when he comes here to-morrow he'll insist on seeing me by myself, and he'll do all he can to disgust me and madden me—in the hope of widening the breach between Chris and me."

"But it seems such a senseless thing to do! When once a thing is done, like the marriage of his son, there's no sense in trying to undo it."

"That's what he hopes to do, though, to undo it," said Patricia, with a sudden, ominous calmness. "But he shan't," she added suddenly, in a voice they hardly recognised as hers, so hard, so determined it was. "He is fighting for Chris on his side, and I'm fighting on mine. And we'll see which side will win."

"He will, decidedly, if you go on as you're doing," said Lady Gane.

Giles meanwhile had preserved a discreet silence, but he was deeply interestd in the discussion, and began to perceive strongly that he was concerned in the upshot of all this.

The more he saw of Patricia, sweetened and beautified and in every way improved since her marriage, as she seemed to him, the more anxious he was that the

he foresaw between her and her husband should
Patricia's marrying himself.
she had seemed so different of late from the
he had imagined her to be, she was so self-
so full of shrewd self-possession, that he felt
means certain that the fruit would fall into his
as he had believed when they had started from

as she was to him, frank and simple as her
rs were with him, there was more of the comrade
f the lover in her attitude, and he began to think
ıere would always be. She had kept her prom-
leed, to forgive his indiscretion of the Hôtel de
, but her forgiveness had been accorded without
ıquetry, in straightforward confidence that he
keep his word as to his future behaviour; and
hen her manner towards him had been so well-
, until that evening when she had acted differ-
o exasperate her father-in-law, that she had left
lismayed by the consciousness that she looked
him quite frankly as a comrade and nothing

was her outrageous coquetry of that evening
ted to make him any happier. If she had felt
with him, or had believed herself to be under
:essity of being on her guard, she would scarcely
ıred to be so audacious in her flirtation.
ı, therefore, had been in a state of considerable
ıe as to the result of the evening's proceedings,

and now the knowledge that her father-in-law desired a rupture between the young husband and wife added fuel to the fire which began to rage in his breast.

It looked, indeed, as if the old man, with callous disregard of his son's feelings and of the happiness of the young people, were trying to throw the young wife into a dangerous state of open revolt.

And Giles wondered whether he should find his chance in this.

And even while he wondered he was struck with admiration of the dogged courage which Patricia showed, and of the loyalty with which she had held to her husband, in spite of absence and of the exasperation of the behaviour of his people.

In the pause that followed Lady Gane's despairing sneer, he spoke for the first time.

"Brava, Patricia!" he said. "You've been quite frank and honest from first to last, and your father-in-law hasn't. So your chance ought to be better than his, as you say."

Patricia turned upon the speaker a pair of inquiring blue eyes. There was some strange new thought in her mind, he could see by the expression in her beautiful face.

"Yes," she said, slowly, "it ought, oughtn't it?"

And then she remained staring at him without speaking, as if the thought which had evidently just entered her mind were maturing there.

"What's the matter, Pat? What are you thinking about?" asked Lady Gane, when she too perceived



that her sister was in the act of forming some resolution.

Patricia turned slowly, so as to face them both.

"I'll tell you—you and Giles too, in the morning," she said quietly. "I must have time to think it over first."

So Giles said good-night and went away, with a promise to return next day, which Patricia exacted in spite of his persuasions and those of her sister, who advised her not to see anything more of him until old Christopher Thorne had gone away.

But Patricia was obstinate, and had to be humoured; so he left with a promise to lunch with the ladies.

"Yes," Lady Gane had said with a nod, when Giles protested in the interests of prudence, "let her cut her own throat and get it over, if she wants to."

So it was settled, and the ladies, left to themselves, retired to rest without much more delay. As Lady Gane said: "What was the use of talking to Pat? It was wasting one's breath to try to make her behave like other people."

On the following morning Patricia was in a state of intense nervous excitement, which made her restless, indeed, but not talkative. She remained by herself waiting for the expected arrival of her father-in-law and the battle she meant to have with him.

But he did not come. And when Giles arrived to luncheon the real business of the day had not begun.

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answer.

Luncheon was not a lively
three people present were all
and disturbed, and while La
changed a few comments upo
of the old man, Patricia did



In a loud voice, with a look of intense excitement in her eyes, she said:—

"I must go to Chris—at once."

Her sister protested gently.

"My dear Pat, how can you travel alone to Russia! A pretty woman like you too!"

"Of course I can't go alone," said Patricia with energy. "I must have some one to look after me, some one who can be useful, too, when I get face to face with Chris."

"Ah, yes, if you could find such a person, some one who would help to persuade him that it was all right, and that you hadn't ever done any harm, after all, beyond being rather silly and indiscreet!"

Patricia hardly listened to her.

"I must have some one with me," she said, "who can talk to people and get over difficulties, for I suppose travelling in Russia is something too awful, isn't it?" she went on, turning sharply to Giles, who had been listening in silence.

"Yes, it's pretty bad," he said. "I've only been there once—had to go with two other men on some Government business. But it wasn't so bad then as it will be now."

"Well, it's got to be done," said Patricia with calm desperation. "And without any delay, too. There's something wrong. Either Chris is ill—or—there's something!"

She paused, with a face full of acute apprehension. Then she turned suddenly to Giles.

"Will you take me there?" she asked.

Giles was taken aback. But Lady Gane, after a moment's pause of breathless amazement, burst into a long peal of ironical laughter.

"Oh, Pat, you are really too ridiculous!" she said, when she had recovered a little. But it was evident that, though she tried to laugh it off, she was really genuinely disturbed by the wild suggestion. "The idea of asking a man to take you to Russia! or——" and she stopped and sat up nervously. "What on earth do you mean, Pat?" she burst out with sudden irritability.

"I mean just what I say," said Pat quietly. "We'll take some one with us—either Richards, if you can spare her, or Jim, if he'll come, or Bob. But I must have Giles because he knows something about the beastly place, and can get us through. Besides, after what has been said about Giles and me, the best possible answer to it would be for him to go with me and face it. You wouldn't mind, would you, Giles?" asked she simply.

"I'm absolutely at your orders. I'd go to India, anywhere, at a word from you."

"Thanks. You're a dear," she said with the same frank simplicity as before.

"Giles, don't encourage her in her folly! You know you don't mean to go with her on such a crack-brained expedition!" said Lady Gane sharply. "He's only pretending he's ready, just to humour you," she added,



turning scornfully to her sister, but with an uneasy look in her eyes.

There was a calmness, an absence of hysteria about Patricia's wild pronouncement which filled her with secret alarm.

"Are you pretending, Giles?" asked she, looking him steadily in the eyes.

"No; I'm just as serious as you are."

Lady Gane sat back in her chair and began to shed tears.

"It's disgraceful," she said, "simply disgraceful! and it's a most dreadful thing to be related to a woman who has no sense of doing things decently or in the proper way."

Patricia got up and began to laugh.

"Our notions of decency are not the same, Lorna," she said; "but why need you trouble your head about me? Nobody can say you're responsible for what I do. I shall start to-morrow, Giles," she added, turning to him.

"Very well. Do you go to London first?"

"Yes, of course we must, to pick up my brother, whichever of the two will come. And I shall want some more money from Papa. And oh, I shall want some of my warm things, shan't I? I brought scarcely anything here."

"Yes, you will."

Lady Gane sprang up, and came between the two with a dramatic gesture.

"Whatever you do afterwards, Pat," she said, "you are not going to leave Cannes with Giles. I never heard of such a thing! I should be left here to bear the brunt of the scandal, and I simply won't have it."

"There will be no scandal," said Patricia, scornfully laughing.

Lady Gane turned to Giles.

"You will go first, Giles. No, you will let her go first. It's better, if anything is better than anything else in this absurd and dreadful business, that you should be thought to be following her than that she should be thought to be following you."

"Oh, Lorna, how ridiculous you are! If we went together there would be no talk, it would be too simple."

"You will do as I say," said Lady Gane peremptorily. "You, Pat, can start to-morrow if you're bent on this folly, and you, Giles, can go the day after."

Patricia acquiesced.

"That will do," she said. "You will be in town by the time I'm ready. There will be lots of things to do first, of course. I shall get Myra to help me."

Lady Gane cast up her eyes.

"Myra! You'll get some plain speaking from her," she said.

But Patricia was impervious to sarcasm. When Giles went away, however, Lorna spoke out more forcibly than she could do in his presence.

"Are you mad, Pat," she asked, "to do this thing? Don't you know that everybody will say you've run



away with him, and that you will get all the credit of an elopement without the satisfaction of it?"

But Pat was firm.

"I know what I'm doing," she said. "If I turn up with Giles and one of my brothers, how can Chris fail to see that it's all right?"

"But Bob won't go, and Jim won't either. And if they did, who would believe that either of those two young scamps was any protection? No. The only scrap of comfort for me is that in all probability Chris will insist on divorcing you, and that then you can marry Giles and be respectable."

Patricia was not shocked. The Goldsmiths as a family were too outspoken for such a plain statement of opinion to seem anything but natural. But she said quietly:—

"I shall never be the wife of any man but Chris. I don't think I knew how much I cared for him till his horrible old father came and frightened me by showing me how much he wanted to keep us apart. It was his coming that made me see that I must go to Chris, since he can't or won't come to me."

"Why can't you go alone, then?"

"How can I travel to Russia all by myself? You know it's impossible."

Lady Gane shrugged her shoulders.

"I wash my hands of you," she said. "You are quite too utterly impossible, Pat. I always thought Myra and I were considered just a wee bit—er—what shall I say——?"



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very glad when I hear th
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"Thanks so much," sai
ask Richards to pack up for

CHAPTER XX

LADY GANE had a lingering hope that, between that day and the next Patricia would change her mind. But her hopes were vain. And on the following morning, after insisting that Giles should come to the station to see her off, "as if the gossip wouldn't be bad enough without that," as Lady Gane remarked plaintively, the younger sister started on her journey to London.

She slept but little on the long journey, but she was too excited to show any traces of fatigue when she reached town. She had asked Myra to meet her at Charing Cross, and they went back together to Lancaster Gate to dine.

There Patricia, as simply as before, unfolded her wonderful plan.

Myra took it with much hilarity.

"Well done, Pat," she said. "I always knew you were bound to distinguish yourself one of these days, and you're doing it now. Fancy the originality of taking one's lover with one to meet one's husband and help you to make it up! It's a stroke of genius, dear, really."

Patricia did not frown, did not lose her temper. She understood Myra, as she understood Lorna, and could treat them each in the right way.

plexed.

"Well, but you must like
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Patricia nodded with con

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Chris."

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"I dare say not. But it d
of Chris."

Myra paused, beset by a nev

"Have you considered, chi
what this journey means?



"And another thing. This silence of his—you don't know whether the reason may be that he's dead."

Patricia uttered a cry. Never in her wildest imaginings had anything so dreadful occurred to her. The thought of him, so tall, strong, and handsome, seemed to her mind, which was in many respects still that of a child, absolutely incompatible with thoughts of illness, disease, death. No, no, no. He was alive, alive and well, stalwart, blue-eyed, gentle of voice, tender and true to her and longing for her presence —longing to know that she loved him as much as ever.

Patricia, as these thoughts passed like lightning through her excited mind, trembled and changed colour, alarming Myra, who clung to her, and told her it was all right, all right, she didn't want to frighten, only to warn her.

"And if he is dead," she added more cheerfully, without measuring the effect of her words on poor Patricia, "why, then you can marry Giles, and all will be right again."

Patricia clenched her teeth and shook her sister.

"How dare you say that to me? You don't understand, any more than Lorna did! I tell you I should never marry Giles if he and I were the only people left in the world."

"But you like him?"

"Yes, in one way. But not in that way. There's only one man in the world for me, and if he's d-d-d-ead," sobbed she, breaking down utterly at last,

sand. Having a very low c
eral, she thought it quite
alive, Christopher Thorne w
out his wife, and that he wo
at her turning up, with or
chosen escort.

But even she, with all h
lack of tact, hesitated to
Patricia.

She did. however, make o
mark.

"After all," she said, with
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worst, and if it shouldn't turn
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ple do, you can always go on th

Patricia frowned.

She knew quite well what h
bers of the half-smart set, w
step too far in any direction
stage. M



"But you can look pretty. And that does just as well, or even better," said her sister sagely.

Patricia rose to her feet. They were sitting together in Myra's boudoir when the suggestion was made.

"You've said something," she observed with a serious look on her face, "that deserves thinking about. Of course he may not be in Russia at all now. He may be on his way back. That would perhaps account for my not having heard."

"Perhaps," said Myra incredulously.

She had quite made up her own mind that Chris had been effectually estranged from his wife by his family's agency, and she desired nothing so much as some way of preventing this mad expedition to Russia.

"If I were you, I should wait a few days, at any rate and see whether another letter comes after all."

Patricia shook her head.

"I shall just do one thing," she said. "When Giles arrives from Cannes to-morrow morning, I shall get him to help you to choose the things I shall want for the journey."

"All right. Yes, I should enjoy a flirtation with Giles," said Myra promptly.

If she hoped to make Patricia jealous the attempt was a failure.

"And then," went on the younger sister, "I shall run up myself to Barnsfield, and try to find out there if anything has been heard of him."

"Oh, surely you won't go back to those wretches!"

"Not to stay with them; but if I can get hold of

Patricia bowed her head

"I shall certainly, if a
me," she said dismally. '
all if I can."

"Why go at all?"

"Because, after what y
that it would be folly to g
sure he's there."

"Hooray!" cried Myra
a gleam of common sense a

Patricia treated the sugg
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every subject but one.

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would advise her as to the
the journey, and provide him

you'd better see him and tell him what to buy, too. He'll want fur boots and something to put on his face to prevent his nose coming off, won't he?"

Giles assured her that this was not an accident of such common occurrence as to need special provision against it of the kind she suggested, and then he hesitated, and showed by his manner that he had something to say which he did not like to utter.

"Well, what is it?" asked Pat, when she perceived his sudden shyness.

"I wanted to tell you, Pat, how much touched and —and delighted I am that you should trust me—that you should choose me to help you through with this business."

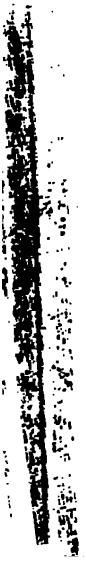
Patricia smiled her pretty grave smile.

"I was sure you would help me loyally, Giles, when it came to a pinch," she said.

But she refrained from telling him, what would not have pleased him so much to hear, that she would probably not have placed so much confidence in him if the episode at the Hôtel de France had not told her exactly how much confidence was to be placed in him, and how little, and had proved to her at the same time that he was not only a person whom it was desirable to know how to manage, but one who could never be a danger to herself.

For there was one quality which Patricia demanded in her friends, and which she possessed herself, that of loyalty.

She had been overconfident of her own safety,



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see her alone.

The journey seemed enc
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She felt that she had 1
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should she have felt so confid
and that her husband would
relations, when all the event
seemed to point the other wa

Had not her father-in-l-

dinary acquiescence in his father's plans and wishes? And was not his long absence inexplicable on any just grounds?

Would not a loving husband have strained every nerve, on learning that his wife had gone back to the companionship of relations whom he disliked and whose influence he feared, to rejoin her, if only for a brief interval, to assure himself of her safety, to assure her of his continued love?

Never before had Patricia's doubts been so strong, never before had she felt such a leaden weight of depression upon her spirits.

If Chris was still in Russia, why had he not written? If he had come home, why had he not joined her?

She felt sick with dread of what she should hear when she got to the Thornes' house, and only her natural courage prevented her from yielding to the cowardly longing which suddenly seized her, prompting her to return to London without having even tried to see Millie.

She dreaded now what she was going to hear, dreaded that it might be the final blow to all her hopes.

She began frantically to wish she had taken Myra's offer of companionship, which she had refused for fear the sight of Myra should exasperate the Thornes still more against herself, in case they caught sight of the dashing and rather startlingly dressed Mrs. Aylwin.

When the train slackened she looked out, with a silly, childish, vague hope that some instinct would have brought Chris himself to the station to meet her,

but of course there was no one to be seen whom she knew, and, anxious to attract as little attention as possible, she resolved not to take a fly, but to walk to the house of the Thornes.

It was quite dark, that was one thing in her favour. No one noticed her as she went quickly through the streets, and when she ran up the little front garden, and rang the bell, shaking from head to foot and scarcely knowing what she was doing, Patricia knew that no one had seen her come up to the door.

She had calculated her time well, and knew that the high tea would be over, that Mr. Thorne would be in his study, and perhaps if she had any luck, that Millie might be alone in the dining room mending something, while old Mrs. Thorne and Carrie were at church, as they often were on Wednesday evening. And this was Wednesday.

For a wonder, the servant who opened the door to her was one of those Patricia had known. The girl uttered an exclamation at sight of her, and instinctively made a movement as if to shut the door in her face.

Patricia drew back a step, horror-struck.

"Don't you know me? I want to see Miss Millie," she said hoarsely.

The door was almost shut. From behind it the girl said, in a frightened voice:

"Oh, ma'am, I'm very sorry, but I mustn't let you in. Those are my partic'lar orders."

Patricia, trembling so much that she had to lean



against the side of the doorway, asked under her breath:—

"Tell me just one thing; have they heard from young Mr. Thorne, my husband?"

The girl drew a quick short breath.

"Oh, ma'am, don't you know?" she said hurriedly, "*he's here.*"

There was a sound of an opening door, and the girl, with a muttered apology, shut the door in Patricia's face.

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calm kind, Patricia went quietly out of the garden and returned to the hotel where she intended to pass the night.

She could not, of course, go back to town without satisfying herself as to the truth of the information she had received; and, unluckily for her, the more she considered the matter, the more she felt that the maid who had administered the cruel blow appeared to be telling the truth as she knew it.

The news that young Mr. Christopher was in the house, indeed, seemed to Patricia, when she thought it over, to have been uttered by the girl involuntarily, as if forced out of her in her surprise to find that the visitor knew so little.

Of course, Patricia said to herself, if he really were in the house, the fact could not be a secret; and she would be able to make quite sure on the point within a few hours. The tradespeople with whom the family dealt would certainly know the truth, and, reluctant as she felt to have to find out what she wanted to know from outside sources, there seemed to be no alternative.

However, in the first place she resolved to try the effect of one more letter, and she wrote the following short appeal, addressed to her husband.

"My Dear Chris,

"I have just been to your father's house, where the maid told me, on opening the door, that you were there, but that you refused to see me. I can't believe

it's true. It is unlike you, it is unlike anybody with the least sense of fairness, not to hear what I have to say for myself.

"I have done no wrong, no wrong at all. I can't think that you would doubt it if you were left to yourself, but I know that your father hates me and would do anything to separate us for good. Nothing less strong than his prejudice would have allowed him to set a detective to spy upon my actions as he did, or would have sent him to Cannes on purpose to find me out, as he supposed. I do beg you, Chris, to see me, and not to believe a word against me without having heard me as well as your father.

"Is it fair, is it right, to treat me like this? To let me come all this way, only to have your father's door shut in my face, and to be told you have given orders I am not to be admitted?

"Why, you would not treat the lowest wretch so!

"I am going to make one more attempt to get into your father's house and to see you. But first I shall wait till I get an answer to this letter.

"I hope that, instead of letting me come again to a house where I have been received so badly, you will come yourself and see me here. Don't you want to see me again, after all your declarations that you loved me so much, and that the world was nothing to you without me? And do you think I don't long to see you, after all this time? Why, it almost killed me, this evening, to be told that you were there and to know that you had not first come to me.

"Even if you have made up your mind that you are



tired of me, that you made a mistake in marrying me, and don't want to have anything more to do with me, you ought first to hear what I have to say, and to hear me, too, face to face with your father. I know he hates me, he has never made much pretence of anything else, but *you* ought to be fair.

"Your loving wife,

"PATRICIA."

She directed this letter to Christopher Thorne, Esq., Junior, and posted it at once. Then, resolved to do nothing whatever until she had given a reasonable time for an answer, she waited.

On the following morning there was no letter for her, but she thought she was perhaps too impatient, so she went for a long walk by herself, looked at the furnished villa where her married life had come to such an abrupt end, and returned to the hotel, without having been near the house of her father-in-law.

She was hoping against hope that the post would have brought her a letter from her husband.

But there was none, and, with an ever-increasing weight of despair in her breast, she passed the hours in solitary depression, until night came.

Then she made another attempt. She wrote the following letter to Millie:—

"MY DEAR MILLIE,

"I suppose you know what has happened, how I went to your father's house last night and was refused permission to go in. I had asked to see you. I have

been told that Chris is in the house, but that he has given orders that I am not to be admitted. I don't believe this, by the bye. The person who gave those orders is your father, for nobody else would be heartless and wicked enough to do so. I am sorry to have to say such a thing about him to you, but you must know how he has treated me, and that it is wrong and cruel both to his son and to me.

"Will you, when you get this letter, answer me and tell me the truth? Is Chris in your father's house? Is he determined never to see me again?

"I should like to see you if you will come. But if not, I should be glad of a letter. I know you are awkwardly placed, and that you cannot do just what you please, but I don't think you will refuse to give me some sort of answer.

"Yours affectionately,

"PATRICIA."

She posted this letter, and went through the same tedious process of waiting as before. But no answer came during the whole of the following day.

It was not until the morning after that she got the following letter. She scarcely recognised Millie's handwriting at first, and as she read what she wrote, Patricia began to wonder whether it had really been written by her gentle sister-in-law. But a close examination revealed only too plainly the fact that it was no forgery, and that the alteration in the handwriting was merely the effect of the emotion experienced by the writer.

"DEAR PATRICIA," Millie wrote,

"I am sorry I can do nothing for you. It is quite true that Chris is here, and that he won't see you. I hope you won't try to come in against his wish. It is painful to me to have to write this, but for the sake of all of us, you as well as the rest, I do hope you will not try to make us all uncomfortable by insisting upon trying to get in again. Things might become very serious if you did.

"Yours affectionately,

"MILLIE."

Now Patricia knew that this was not the sort of letter which her good-natured sister-in-law would write if she were left to herself, and she decided at once that it was inspired by the powers.

Patricia, who had begun by being thoroughly and wholly miserable, now felt a different emotion. She was a woman of spirit, and the consciousness that she was being treated abominably made her revolt, and say that she would have justice, no matter how hard she might have to try, no matter what inconveniences and painful episodes she might have to go through in the attempt.

There was something that she did not know. Whether her husband was really in his father's house she began to doubt, thinking that perhaps they only said so in order to keep her in the neighbourhood for some reason of their own.

If he was ill, she thought, they would scarcely dare

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When she heard footsteps in the hall at last, she recognised them as old Mr. Thorne's.

At once the trembling, nervous woman became a different creature. Face to face with the man whom she looked upon as the author of all her troubles, she would stand up to him, she would defy him, she would insist upon being accorded her rights.

As she had defied him at Cannes, so she would defy now, she would insist upon seeing Chris if he was in the house, or in learning where he was to be found.

And when the door was slowly opened, and she found herself, as she had expected, in the presence of old Christopher Thorne, she felt as bold as a lion.

"How do you do, Mr. Thorne? I want to see my husband, if you please," she said, as soon as the door was open wide enough for him to see her.

"Unfortunately that's impossible," he said in his cold, hard voice. "He particularly requested us to keep you away from him."

"I'm sorry to have to say such a thing to you, but I don't believe you're telling me the truth," said Patricia boldly.

By this time the door was open sufficiently for her to see that there were faces in the dark hall, at some of the doors. Whether they were the faces of men or of women she could not make out, but she supposed them to be those of old Mrs. Thorne and her daughters.

Old Christopher Thorne uttered a hard laugh.

"I know you and your ways, Patricia," he said after a pause, during which she, listening eagerly, tried to

distinguish and understand certain sounds she heard within the house. She thought she heard sobbing, the sobbing of a woman. The sound chilled and alarmed her.

"If you mean that you know I have my own way when I've made up my mind that I'm in the right," replied Patricia, raising her voice a little, so that it might reach the ears of those within the house, and among them, as she hoped, those of Millie, "you do know my ways, Mr. Thorne. I know that Chris ought to see me if he is here, and I know, too, that he would want to see me if he knew I were here. Will you tell me why I am not allowed to see him?"

"It is by his wish."

"Is he ill?"

"He is not very well, and it is considered desirable that he should not be exposed to any great excitement."

"You mean that he would consider it a dangerous excitement to see me, his wife?"

"I have to go by what the doctor says. He expressly forbade you to be admitted."

"Oh! At first I was told it was Chris himself who refused to see me, who gave orders that I was to be kept out of the house. Now you say that it is not by his wishes or orders, but by those of the doctor. Will you please tell me the name and address of this doctor who is attending him? I should like to see him."

"I am sorry, but I prefer that you should not see him."

"And I insist."



Old Christopher's tone became harder than ever as he went on:—

"Two sides can insist, as I suppose you know. Where my son's health, perhaps his sanity, is concerned, I can insist just as well as you."

"His sanity! What do you mean? Why don't you tell me the whole truth? You are torturing me!" said Patricia, her voice at last showing signs of breaking down.

"It doesn't seem to be of much use talking to you," said the old man drily. "Since you flatly refuse to believe anything you are told."

Patricia drew back a moment, wounded, distressed almost beyond the bounds of endurance. Her anxiety, her piteous distress, however, quite failed to have any softening effect upon the hard old man.

He tried to shut the door, but she was too quick for him. With a rapid forward movement she got past him and stood in the hall.

She would have run up the stairs but that, as she approached them, Mrs. Thorne burst out of the dining room and barred the way.

At the same time Patricia caught sight of the figures of Millie and Carrie at the door of the opposite room.

She was surrounded. On all sides she saw faces which filled her with alarm. There was something hidden from her, something she must know. She caught old Mrs. Thorne by the arm.

"Tell me the truth," she cried imperiously. "Tell me the whole truth about Chris, or I won't leave the house."

Before Mrs. Thorne could answer, however, the old man came up, and seizing Patricia by the arm, would have dragged her to the door.

But she would not go. Clinging to Mrs. Thorne, she raised her voice still higher, crying:—

"I won't go till I've been told the truth."

Then Carrie, with a little more intelligence than the others, used gentler means.

"Of course you must know the truth," she said quickly, "but not out here. Come into the drawing room," and she seized the handle of the nearest door, and threw it open, "and we'll tell you."

Patricia would have been quite grateful for this, the first conciliatory word which had been addressed to her, if she had not caught a look of intelligence passing from one of the ladies to the other that warned her that what she would be told would be some made-up story, and not the truth which she was so anxious to hear. However, she found herself in the drawing room, with Mrs. Thorne and Carrie, and with old Christopher standing guard at the door.

Millie, whom she was sure she had seen when she was in the hall, had disappeared. This was a bad sign, she knew.

Millie was the one person who would help her if she could.

"Now," said Patricia fiercely, turning to face Mr. Thorne, "tell me all there is to be told. Is Chris here? Is he ill? Or, if not, where is he?"

"He was here this morning," answered Mr. Thorne



quietly, "but when we learned that you had not left Barnsfield, we were afraid of your forcing your way in to see him, against the doctor's orders, and we had him removed."

"Removed!" echoed Patricia aghast. "Where to?"

"A home where he will be taken care of until he is quite himself again."

Patricia, doubting, fearing, confused, distressed, for a few moments did not know what to say. Then she asked in a low voice:—

"Do you mean that since he came back from Russia he has been out of his mind?"

"Not quite so bad as that," said old Mr. Thorne; "but, as his mind seems to be trembling in the balance it was thought better to order him the most complete rest."

"But wouldn't it be better for him to see me, since I know he must be anxious about me?" asked she quickly.

"You shall see him when he gets better," interrupted Mrs. Thorne, speaking very fast and excitedly, "but not yet, not now."

Patricia stood silent for a few moments.

"Will you give me the address of the doctor who is attending him?" she said in a low voice.

She knew in a moment, by the pause that followed, that she had been told nothing but falsehoods. As no one spoke, she laughed a little, mockingly, under her breath.

"Never mind," she said. "I won't trouble you, if

you have forgotten it. And I won't keep you any longer, straining your invention. Good-bye, Mrs. Thorne; good-bye," and she bent her head towards old Christopher without looking at him, "I congratulate you upon the means you are taking to secure the health and happiness of your son."

The words seemed to have some effect upon the old lady, for she began to moan and to utter in a low voice certain whimpering entreaties to her husband.

But Carrie came forward, intercepted her mother, who appeared to be about to throw herself upon Patricia in a melting mood, and said sharply:—

"Mother, Patricia wants to go away. She is excited, she doesn't want to break down. Let her do as she likes."

The old man, too, threw at his wife a warning glance, and she sobbed quietly and did not make any further attempt to speak to her daughter-in-law.

Patricia walked out of the room and left the house in a tumult of feeling, in which she scarcely knew herself whether rage or terror or grief was the strongest.

Within two hours she had started on her return journey to London.

She did not know what to believe. She did not know where to turn for help. At one moment she had thought of writing to the Thorne's family doctor, whose name she knew, to ask him whether it was true that her husband was in his care and whether it would really be dangerous for him to see her. The next moment she told herself that this would be of no use. The



doctor would be at the mercy of any tale the family might choose to tell him. And if, as she supposed, old Mr. Thorne should have informed him that there was friction between the young husband and wife, it was quite possible that the medical man might agree with him that it would be better for the wife to keep away for the present.

It was in a state of the most acute mental distress, therefore, that she reached the home of her parents in Lancaster Gate that night, and throwing herself into the arms of her mother, sobbed her heart out, and told her she would never be happy again.



CHAPTER XXII

THE hoarse voice of Myra made her lift her head from her mother's shoulder.

"What's up, Pat?" asked her sister, and Patricia, turning quickly, saw that not only her sister but Giles Wendover had witnessed her burst of emotion.

She drew herself up and wiped her eyes.

"The Thornes are beasts," she sobbed out; "they won't let me see Chris, and they won't even let me know where he is."

"Won't let you know where he is? Isn't he in Russia, then, after all?"

"I don't know. When I got to the house first I was told by the servant that he was there, but that he wouldn't see me. Afterwards they told me—old Mr. Thorne told me—that he had been sent away. They said first that he was ill, and then that he was nearly out of his mind. And they wouldn't give me the name and address of his doctor."

Mrs. Goldsmith was crying quietly.

"I do wish you'd married in our set, Pat," she sobbed. "Then all this wouldn't have happened."

"Well, it's too late to think about that now, Mother," said Myra. "The question is what's to be done to get Pat properly treated by her husband and his people."



"It's nothing to do with Chris," said Patricia quickly.

"Well, you can't be sure. They say he wouldn't see you."

"But it isn't true."

"If he was in the house it's true, I should think," persisted Mrya. "Look here. Do you suppose, if he were really there, and ill, and he wanted to see you, that they'd have dared to keep you out? Ask yourself if it's likely!"

"He wouldn't have had me turned away. It's not possible," persisted Pat stoutly.

"You don't know. Remembering what you know of the father, it seems to me you think too well of the son. It's a great pity you ever had anything to do with them; but, as I said, now we must put our heads together and see how you are to get free."

"Free!" echoed Patricia in surprise.

"Yes. You don't mean to put up with any more of this sort of treatment, do you?"

"I mean," said Patricia steadily, "to see Chris, that's what I mean to do. When I've succeeded, when I've found out what he thinks of the behaviour of his people, then I shall be able to tell you what I mean to do afterwards."

Mrs. Goldsmith intervened.

"The only thing to be done at present," she said, "is for you to go to your father's solicitors, and consult them. They will write to these Thornes, and make them explain."

"I don't want to have to go and make out that I've been refused admittance to my husband's home by him," said Patricia. "It would be a dreadful thing to have to tell them."

"But you don't think it's true. You think it was old Mr. Thorne who pretended his son wouldn't see you."

"Yes," said Patricia. "But still, I should have to tell them what was said by Mr. Thorne, or he wouldn't know what to write to him, would he? I think I'd rather not see any solicitors. That may have to come later, I suppose, but I don't want to believe that yet."

Myra bounced off her chair and rushed to Giles.

"What are you thinking about, Giles?" she said. "You've got to help us find a way out of this worry, since you're the only man here."

"Well," said he, "I have a suggestion to make, for what it's worth."

The three ladies crowded round him, and asked him what it was.

"It's just this," he said. "I believe, as Pat does, that her husband never gave such an order as that they said he did. Thorne was crazily in love with her when he married her, and it's not at all likely that he's anything else now."

"Oh, Giles, you dear!" murmured poor Patricia. "And where do you think he is, then?"

"It seems to me most likely that he's in his father's house all the time, that they want to keep her away from him, and that when the maid said he was there,



she was letting out more than she would have done if she had been on her guard."

"Well, but would they be able to keep her away if he wanted to see her?" said Myra.

"They might if he's ill."

"You think they would dare?"

"From what old Thorne has done already, it seems to me he would dare anything, risk anything, in order to make mischief between the two. Heaven only knows why he should. But, as I say, it looks like it."

"And what am I to do then?" asked Patricia, down whose face by this time tears of despair were flowing.

"You must manage to force your way in, to see him—if he's there—in spite of everybody."

"Ah! But how can one? They're all on their guard. I did get into the house—right inside, but I couldn't go upstairs. One can't fight one's way through a family!" sobbed Patricia.

"That's what you'll have to do, though, I fancy," retorted Giles coolly. "Look here, if you'll take me as bodyguard, and Myra for propriety, we'll force a way in for you, in spite of them all."

The ladies were shocked.

Even Myra protested.

"She couldn't very well make a disturbance in the house when she's been told he's ill," she said. "Besides, if he is really ill, as I suppose, it might make him worse for such a commotion to take place in his hearing."

But Giles was obdurate.

"Whatever you say," he said doggedly, "won't con-

vince me that I'm wrong. I believe that Christopher Thorne has come back from Russia very ill, so ill that he is helpless in the hands of his relations. I think they have taken advantage of that fact to keep all news of his wife from him, and that they'd rather let him die without a sight of her or a word with her than let her take her proper place by his side and make it up with him. Of course I may be wrong; but putting this and that together, the old man's conduct at Cannes with his conduct in his own house, my suggestion seems the most likely one."

"But would it do—to force my way in—in spite of everybody? Could I do it, even with your help?" urged Patricia in a low voice.

"I strongly urge you to try," said Giles eagerly. "Supposing I'm wrong, and he isn't there, what harm will you have done? They can't be nastier to you than they've been already!"

"I have a good mind to try, if you and Myra would really come with me," almost whimpered Patricia.

Myra was rather alarmed at the prospect of an encounter with the full strength of the family whom she called the "Barnsfield Horrors," but she at length allowed herself to be persuaded to join the strange expedition.

Mrs. Goldsmith, indeed, suggested that it would be better for one of Patricia's brothers to go instead of Giles; but Myra, who knew that Bob and Jim were remarkable for anything rather than tact, protested against the proposal, and said that, since Patricia had



already signified her intention of taking Giles with her to Russia if she had had to go there, no more harm could be done by his accompanying her and her sister as far as Yorkshire.

So the expedition was resolved upon, and the very next day Giles and Myra and Patricia all went up to Barnsfield, as the search party, as Giles called it.

When they got to the hotel where Myra had put up on her previous journey to Barnsfield, the three held a consultation as to their plan of attack.

It was resolved that they should wait until evening, and then go in a cab to the villa, where Myra and Patricia should remain in the vehicle, while Giles went up to the house.

They got into the fly, therefore, when it was quite dark, and drove to the villa. Patricia pointed out to them that, as before, there was no light in the window of the room which had always been that of Chris, but Giles suggested that they might have put him into another room on purpose to divert her suspicions.

When the fly stopped, Giles got out by himself, and bade the ladies remain where they were until he should come back to fetch them.

This was his plan; that he, being unknown personally to any of the household except old Christopher Thorne, should make the first attack, the forlorn hope, as he called it.

Patricia wanted to know whom he should ask for, but he told her he should be guided by circumstances, and that she had better leave him to do as he pleased.

In fear and trembling, therefore, and fully expecting each moment to see him come out of the house in a furious passion, after being insulted by old Mr. Thorne, the two sisters sat in the fly, holding each other's hands, and waiting for the result of their daring attempt.

Giles, meanwhile, having left them in the fly not exactly opposite the house, but a few doors away in order to escape observation from the Thorne household, went quickly up the garden and knocked at the door.

"Is young Mr. Thorne in?" he asked of the maid who answered his summons.

"Yes, sir, he's in," she answered, "but he's too ill to see anybody."

"Indeed. I'm sorry to hear that! I suppose he was ill, then, when he came back from Russia?" said Giles.

"Oh, yes, sir. It was as much as he could do to get here. He went to London first, sir, and old Mr. Thorne he had to go there and to bring him on here."

"Indeed! I'm sorry to hear that. I hope he's going on pretty well? What do they say it is?"

"Enteric fever, sir, the doctor says."

"And he's been ill long?"

"Well, the doctor says he was ill before he left Russia. He says he must have been bad about ten days already, sir."

Giles had taken care to keep his voice subdued to a low pitch.

"Do you think I could see one of the ladies?" he



said. "I have something to tell them, something I should have liked to tell Mr. Christopher himself, if he hadn't been ill."

"Which of the ladies would you like to see, sir?" asked the maid, who had evidently not the least suspicion that he was an emissary of the enemy who had been trying to storm the fortress.

"Is Miss Millie at home?"

"Yes, sir, I think so. Will you step in here?"

The maid showed him into the dining room, where there was a pleasant-faced girl sitting by the fire.

"Oh, here is Miss Millie, sir," said the maid. "A gentleman to send a message for young Mr. Thorne, miss. I told him he was ill."

Millie had risen to her feet and was looking at Giles with frightened eyes. It was evident to the visitor that she could guess, better than the servant, on what sort of errand he had come.

"You have a message for my brother?" she asked, in a tremulous voice.

"Yes," said he in a voice not much louder than her own. "I am Giles Wendover. You have heard of me, I suppose?"

Millie looked at him as if he had been Lucifer himself.

"Wendover!" she echoed in unaffected horror; "and you have come here—to see my brother!"

"Yes," said he boldly, "and, since I can't see him, I've come to see *you*, Miss Thorne, and to tell you what rot it is that your father has been telling you all, about

me and young Mrs. Thorne. Oh, don't look so scared, so shocked. There's nothing to be shocked about, except that your father could be such an old donkey as to try to interfere between those two. Patricia's breaking her heart because she's kept away from her husband, just as, if you'd only confess the truth, you know he is breaking his because he can't see her. Now I want you to play good angel, and smuggle her in to see her husband, and if she doesn't do him more good than all the doctors, I'll eat my head."

Millie was staring at him in blank surprise and a sort of terror.

That this dashing, handsome, wicked, wild Giles Wendover, of whom she had heard as an evil disposed and most dangerous villain, should dare to come to her father's house and plead the cause of the young couple whom her father had separated took Millie's breath away.

Strongly as she had begun to feel that her father was behaving badly to his son and his young wife, she would never have dared to make a bold move in the matter but for this sudden and most unexpected attack from the very person whom she had been led to look upon as the fomenter of the troubles between the young couple.

"And you say this, you?" she gasped at last, when he had paused a moment.

"Yes, I say it, I, who have the greatest right to interfere on her behalf, for I've been one of the Goldsmith set for ever so long, and I should have ended by marry-



Patricia if she hadn't shown so decidedly that she n't care two straws for me, but only for Chris orne."

Millie bounded forward and leaned upon the table.

'Oh, is this true?" she gasped, with a flash of joy minating her face.

'Of course it's true."

'And she, where is she?"

He leaned across the table on the other side.

'Outside in a cab, with her sister, Mrs. Aylwin."

'Oh, dear, oh, dear, I daren't—— What is it you nt me to do? But, oh, I can't do it! It would be h a surprise! He's not conscious all of the time. ght it not kill him?"

'Come, you know it won't. You're a good girl, a e girl, I've heard all about you from Patricia, and ı know in your heart of hearts,—you must know— ıt it's the best chance he has of getting well quickly, have his wife by his side. Now, isn't it? Just ask ırself."

Millie gave a deep sigh.

'I don't know what they'll say," she said in a tremu- s voice.

'Do you care?"

'Ye—es, I do. You don't know my people. You ı't guess the life they'll lead me if I do what you nt. They think—that Patricia is wicked, that she es for you, not for Chris, and that—that she's not rthy to be his wife at all."

'And do *you* believe all that, come, do you?"

She looked up at him with wild eyes.

"I don't know what to think. You—you are in love with her yourself, Mr. Wendover, they say."

"Oh, as to that, I was once, and I could be now, at this very moment, without the slightest difficulty, if only she'd let me. *But she won't!* That's the worst of it."

"The worst of it! A married woman! Oh, Mr. Wendover!"

"Well, you've pictured me with horns and a tail, so I thought it would be more satisfactory if I lived up to the character," retorted Giles. "But seriously, now, will you do what I ask? Come, you will, Miss Millie, won't you, won't you?"

She was yielding. One sob more, and then she bowed her head in assent. He was at the door in a moment.

"I'll bring her straight in," he whispered, "and you must smuggle her upstairs. Then I'll go away, or stay and help you to face it out, whichever you like."

Millie dried her frightened eyes.

"I—I—I think you'd better go," she said feebly.

"All right," said he. "Keep the door open, and mind, if you play me false, I'll bring the house down!"

She shook her head, sobbing softly as she stood, frightened and shivering, at the front door.

Giles ran down the path, and to the door of the fly, which was already open. Patricia, trembling very much, and not asking one question, came to meet him,



and he took her back quickly up to the front door of the villa.

It seemed to him that the door was closing.

"Run, run," whispered he in her ear.

And she ran, ran straight into the arms of Millie, who gave her one quick silent kiss and dragged her towards the stairs.

Up they went, frightened for fear some one should pounce upon them from one or other of the rooms they had to pass.

And then they reached the door of a room at the back of the house, and Millie opened it softly, and beckoned to the nurse who was sitting by the bed.

"It's his wife," she whispered.

And in another moment Pat, shaking like a leaf, was kneeling by her husband's bedside.



...as asleep.

Patricia watche
scarcely noticing the n
other side of the bed.

Chris looked changed,
seemed to have lost the
which had been charact
short married life togeth
of care and anxiety which

She knelt there quietly
ing, gazing into the face
her blue eyes grew moist
quiver.

And as she looked and w
when he opened his eyes,
asked herself whether she h
dangerous, in coming there

What were the thoughts
during these days of illness
still? Her last letter from
time ago, more than

worrying himself on account of the spiteful letters written to him by his father and mother and Carrie? Would he perhaps be angry with her for coming? Would he refuse to let her stay?

Gazing closely into his face, as she was doing now, she fancied that she saw certain hard lines in it which spoke of anything rather than the weakness of devoted love. And she began to torture herself with fears lest his family should have so poisoned his mind against her that he might spring up in anger when he saw her and perhaps do himself harm by an outburst of jealous resentment.

But even more than this she feared lest one of the Thornes, either Mrs. Thorne or old Christopher or Carrie, might come into the room before he should open his eyes. In that case she felt that her doom was sealed. They would drag her out, and she, knowing the condition in which her husband was lying, would not dare to resist.

In the meantime the nurse, a middle-aged woman, thin, grave and with the quiet manners of her class, was watching her intently from the other side of the bed.

Patricia suddenly caught sight of her, and trembled, thinking that perhaps the woman might want to turn her out. But the nurse only exchanged looks with her, and said nothing, sitting back in her chair and waiting, on her side, while Patricia waited on the other.

At last she saw a slight movement, a quiver of the

eyelids of the invalid. Involuntarily Patricia's hands clutched the bedclothes.

The nurse put up a warning finger, which Patricia instinctively felt, even without looking up, to be a caution to her to use self-restraint.

The young wife drew herself up, feeling that the crisis of her life was come. Chris moved again, opened his eyes, fixed his gaze upon her. Just for one moment there was a look in them which made her quake, a questioning, perturbed, frightened look. Then his face changed, broke up into a sort of flash of joy, and she knew that she was safe, that the worst was over.

The next moment his hand was in hers, and her lips had touched his forehead.

The nurse was watching anxiously, but Patricia's self-command was perfect. Why should it not be? Since her fears were over, she was triumphant, happy.

And Chris was happy too. There was no possibility of mistaking the change which had come over him. The lines seemed to have disappeared from his face; his expression had become one of untroubled joy. He tried to speak, but both women forbade him gently, by smiling gestures rather than by words. And he desisted. He was content.

In their happiness they had forgotten everything; Patricia, satisfied and half-crazy with her recovered joy, knew of nothing at that moment but the fact that Chris was restored to her, not frowning, jealous, angry or suspicious, but just the same devoted, loving



sband whom she had adored in return for his adora-
on of her.

And then, while they were enjoying, almost as if in
dream, this silent, strange reunion, the door opened
d old Mrs. Thorne looked in.

To describe the expression of her face when she saw
hat had happened is impossible. Every feature was
storted in the agony of finding that, in spite of all
eir precautions, and in defiance of her husband's
ders, their son was reunited to his wicked and wilful
ife under their very roof, nay, under her very nose!

Poor Mrs. Thorne, instead of copying the excellent
ample set by Patricia herself, of controlling her
elings for the sake of the invalid, uttered a cry of
smay and despair.

"Christopher, Christopher! Oh, where, where is
r. Thorne?" she cried, as she ran hither and thither
the room, to the scandal of the nurse, who rose
ickly from her seat and quietly ejected her from the
ck-room.

The poor lady turned upon her indignantly.

"You have no right to put me out of the room. It
that woman, that woman by the bed whom you
ould put out!" she cried aghast at the treatment to
hich she was being subjected. "That is the wife we
ld you about; we've been trying all this time to keep
r out, and now you've let her come in. It will kill
y son. And it's—it's all your fault!" she ended,
xious to have a scapegoat on whom she could vent
r anger.

The nurse, however, smiled calmly.

"I think, madam, it will be the saving of his life, this return of his wife," she said.

Mrs. Thorne drew herself up.

"Surely you don't presume to know better than we do, when we know them both, and you don't."

Again the nurse smiled with irritating superiority.

"Well, madam, I do know something. Mr. Thorne —young Mr. Thorne—has spoken to me a good deal about his wife, and said how he wished he could get her to know he was ill. And I should have written to her, madam, if only I'd known where to write to. That I should!"

Mrs. Thorne's indignation was increasing each moment, as was also her fear of her husband's displeasure.

"Then you would have exceeded your duty very much," she said. "I—I—I shall tell my husband."

And unable to express her feelings adequately, the old lady uttered an exclamation which was meant to express unutterable things, and tottered downstairs.

The dining-room door was the first she came to, and she opened it.

What was her astonishment to see a tall, well-dressed and distinguished-looking man sitting near the fire, in close conversation with her younger daughter.

"Millie!" she cried. "Millie!"

It almost seemed as if she doubted the reality of what she saw, so much perturbed was she by the experience she had just gone through.

Millie, however, jumped up with a suddenness and



an agility which were of the earth, and not of the land of dreams.

"Mother, what's—what's the matter?"

Millie's tone was gentle, guilty. She knew very well the sort of thing that must have happened upstairs, and there was her own share in the recent incident to explain.

And the presence of the wicked Giles Wendover.

Happily for everybody, old Mrs. Thorne had no idea who the visitor was, and on seeing him, she checked herself and bowed and looked curiously at her daughter for an explanation of his identity.

But poor Millie did not dare tell the terrible news at once. She felt her way to it cautiously.

"A gentleman who came to ask after Chris, mother," she said disingenuously. "I told him he was ill. He had not known of his return from Russia."

And in all this there was no word to indicate that he was the dreadful Giles Wendover who was going to be the cause of the divorce of Patricia by her husband. This was the story which old Christopher Thorne had told the family; and though Millie herself had during the past half-hour seen reason to doubt the truth of it, the other ladies of the family had heard only his version.

"I hope he is getting on all right?" said Giles.

Old Mrs. Thorne did not immediately connect the stranger with the terrible incident of Patricia's successful evasion of the family forces. She was indeed too much distressed to be capable of clear thought.

"Oh, oh, he was doing very well. We had great hopes. But now—now something dreadful has happened. And I don't know——" She was suddenly seized, in the midst of her rambling speech, with a horrible suspicion that perhaps this handsome stranger was in some way connected with Patricia's bold invasion. Staring full in the face of Giles, she said, in a faint voice: "Who are you?"

"My name," replied the visitor promptly, "is Giles Wendover. I'm an old friend of the Goldsmith family and——"

Mrs. Thorne uttered a suppressed groan.

"Then it was you who—who brought Patricia here! Who *dared* to bring her? Oh! where is Mr. Thorne?"

And without another word the frightened and scandalised woman ran out of the room and went straight to the little study where old Christopher was at work.

She was scarcely able to speak when, white and breathless, she stumbled into her husband's presence.

"Christopher—it's not my fault, indeed, but a dreadful thing's happened. She's got in—Patricia's got in—she's with Christopher now—she won't go away. And—and—— Oh, don't look so angry—it's not my fault—but the man—the man you said she wanted to run away with—that—that Wendover man—is in the dining room, talking to our Millie. And, and Christopher—he must have brought her, brought Patricia here himself!"

The poor lady gasped out the last word and sank upon a chair.



Mr. Thorne did not stop to argue with her, or to console her, although she appealed to him piteously to stay one moment and tell her what to do.

Before she had finished speaking he was out of the room and on his way to beard Giles Wendover and to turn Patricia out.

Millie and Giles were standing close to the mantelpiece, talking very earnestly and very confidentially together. The sight of his daughter thus in parley with the enemy exhausted the patience of the autocratic old Yorkshireman.

"Millie!" he said sharply, "go to your mother. She's in the study."

The girl was moving away slowly to obey, when Giles put out his hand with a smile:—

"Good-bye," he said, "I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again in London, when you come to see your brother and his wife."

Millie, divided for a moment between fear of her father, whose eyes were blazing, and anxiety not to offend this visitor, let the latter feeling get the better of her, and boldly gave him her hand.

"Good-bye," she said. "I hope I shall."

And Giles walked across the room, opened the door for her, and actually had the impudence to address a few words to her in a very low voice as she went out.

Old Christopher Thorne was more than angry, more than scandalised. He was vanquished. He recognised that he had been outwitted, and also that there was little chance of his recovering the ground he had lost.



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ruin."

Giles looked quietly su

"There is some mistak
from wishing to ruin your
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"And do you think *yo*
bring her back?"

"Why, yes, especially a
the wish to take her away,
good-humour.

Old Christopher glared at

"I don't like this flippan
things as honour," said he.

Giles stood up erect.

"If it comes to that," he s
which showed that he unde
intentions perfectly, "there
anxious for as that some o
who it —



what weakly. "And I know they were good. And I allow no man to tell me my thoughts."

"Oh, I'm sure I have no wish to presume upon your confidence," said Giles easily. "I'm quite satisfied with having been able to make Patricia and your son happy again."

And he bowed to the old man and let himself out of the room.

There, however, he was stopped by his indignant host.

"Wait a moment," he said curtly. "You brought this woman here; you must take her back."

"Oh, she won't go," retorted Giles confidently.

"She will. She must," said old Christopher, as he climbed the stairs, feeling by no means so certain as he affected to be that he could accomplish his desire.

He opened the door of the sick-room. Christopher and his wife were alone together; Patricia having taken the nurse's chair on the other side of the bed. Old Christopher glared at her across the bed, and made a peremptory sign to her to come out.

She only shook her head.

Chris, whose eyes had been closed, opened them.

There came a look over his face, when he met his father's eyes, which the old man did not care to meet.

"You must be quiet. Tell your wife to come with me," said the old man gruffly.

Young Christopher, for all answer, brought Patricia's hand to his lips.

"I'm not coming," said Patricia in a soft voice.

"Not if the doctor orders you to?" demanded old Thorne sharply.

She met his eyes steadily, and spoke in the same low voice.

"Not even then, unless Chris says so too."

And the tender father went out of the room, thoughtfully banging the door after him.

"We shan't be allowed to get through without a lot more worry, Chris," said Patricia in his ear when the invalid had recovered from the shock of the noisy entrance and departure of the old man.

"No," said Chris, "I don't suppose we shall. However, nothing matters—now."

And he went to sleep again, quietly, with her hand under his cheek.



CHAPTER XXIV

PATRICIA was right. There was no intention whatever on the part of the elder Thornes of letting bygones be bygones, and of doing their best to appear as if they had never interfered between the husband and wife.

On the contrary, smarting under the blows administered to their vanity by the undoubted improvement in Chris when once he had his wife with him, they determined to make a stronger effort than ever to undo, as soon as the invalid was himself again, the good effect of Patricia's presence upon him.

In the meantime, however, they could not well vent their malice on Patricia herself, as she kept within the two rooms allotted to the invalid and his nurse, and never went out for fear that she would not be allowed in again.

The only member of the family whom she ever saw for a moment, except her husband, was Millie, who used occasionally to steal an opportunity for a few moments' talk with her, and who warned her that the family wrath against her was by no means appeased, and also that she herself was under the ban of her father's displeasure, for having been concerned in admitting the culprits.

Patricia, however, feeling quite secure in her husband's love, only laughed at these warnings. Chris had



was any quarrel, and this w
the old people.

To know that their son
to separate without difficul
they disapproved, was rejoi
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Old Mrs. Thorne, indeed,
than her husband's, began t
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But Carrie and her fath
Chris was foolish enough to be
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was willing to make it up with
to England, she had been brin
while he was away.



For the family were prepared to meet them. The drawing room had been rearranged for the occasion, and an uncomfortable sofa piled with cushions, borrowed from the other rooms in the house, for the use of Chris if he should grow tired.

It was twelve o'clock, and old Christopher had remained at home on purpose to talk to his son. Carrie and her mother were knitting by the fire, old Mr. Thorne was reading his paper by the window, when the door opened to admit the invalid and Patricia, who was looking nervous, indeed, but by no means unhappy. She had at least the satisfaction of knowing that her husband's convalescence had set in sooner and more favourably than if she had not returned to him.

Three pairs of critical eyes looked up as they came in. Millie sneaked into the room behind these two, and at once hid herself away in a corner of the room and busied herself with a book.

Old Mr. Thorne, after insisting upon placing his son upon the sofa, where he sat bolt upright with Patricia beside him, planted himself in the middle of the hearth-rug and cleared his throat ominously.

"I am glad to see you about again, Christopher," he said.

"Thanks, father. I don't feel as if there was much the matter with me, thanks to the care I've received."

The words were possibly intended as a general expression of thanks, but Chris looked at Patricia as he uttered them.

Old Mr. Thorne clasped his hands and looked fierce.

"Unfortunately," he said, "there are some things to be discussed which I should have been glad to have been able to avoid discussing. Things connected with you, Patricia."

The young wife looked up with defiance in her blue eyes.

"Yes," she said, bending her head in proud assent, "you have said a great many things, Mr. Thorne, which I should like you to repeat to Chris. I should like to hear what he thinks of them."

This was an open attack, and the family bridled, all except Millie, who crouched lower in her corner, almost tearful.

Mr. Thorne went on in a firmer tone.

"Unpleasant as it is for me to have to mention it, your wife's conduct while you were away gave distinct occasion for offence, I am sorry to say."

Chris looked at Patricia quite calmly.

"What did she do?" he asked with apparent unconcern.

"Apart from the fact that she left us in an unfriendly manner, and went abroad with one of her sisters, whose way of life is entirely distasteful to people of our way of thinking, her behaviour while in France gave grave cause for scandal."

Chris turned to his wife.

"What did you do, Patricia?" he asked simply.

"Well, I did some things that I had better left un-



done," said she steadily, "but nothing so bad as the things your father did."

There was a family sensation at these words.

"It is quite true," she went on, gathering strength of voice as she proceeded, "that I lived with Lorna, that I went about with her, and that I enjoyed myself, and also that I went down to Cannes with her and Giles Wendover in his motor-car, but I didn't do anything to give your father the right to set a detective to watch me, as he did."

"A detective! Oh, nonsense!" said Chris gently.

Patricia laughed.

"Do you deny it, Mr. Thorne?"

The old man shuffled from one foot to the other and said in a gruff tone:—

"No, I do not deny it. And I say that, considering what he found out, it was high time I did so."

"What did you find out?" cried Patricia.

"It was reported to me that this Mr. Wendover used to sit alone with you in the inns where you all stayed at night, and that he used to kiss you."

Chris looked uneasy.

"It wasn't true, of course," he said quickly.

"It's true he tried to kiss me once," said Patricia, who was scarlet as she made this confession. "Of course I didn't allow him to, and of course he never tried again."

Chris looked uneasy and disturbed.

"But you went on with him to Cannes? You didn't insist upon leaving the party?"

"How could I leave my sister alone? It's absurd to ask me such a thing."

The old man persisted.

"I see nothing absurd in it. It seems to me that a wife who respected her husband's wishes and his honour would have refused to speak again to a man who had attempted to take advantage of her position to make love to her in her husband's absence."

Chris had risen from the sofa, and had walked to the window. He turned upon these words.

"I think so too," said he.

His voice sounded, to Patricia's alarmed ears, almost as stern as that of his father, who went on:—

"But instead of doing so, instead of dismissing him from the circle of your acquaintance for ever, as an honourable woman would have done, you not only went on to Cannes with him and your sister, but you were constantly about with him there, and when you and your sister had a party, you and this Wendover were always together. You became almost inseparable."

"No, that's an exaggeration," cried Patricia.

"Not much, I think."

Patricia began to grow nervous. Chris was getting angry, and there was a suspicious red spot in the middle of each of his pale cheeks. It was plain that she had not reckoned for the effect which these disclosures would have upon him.

For a moment she stood at bay. Then she dashed into her confession, standing erect, with her hands be-



hind her, and facing them all, all except Millie in her far corner.

"Well, it's true," she admitted in a firm voice, with a touch of the old devil-may-care manner of her young-girl's days, "that I was glad, awfully glad, to have Giles to talk to and to go about with."

There was a murmur of scandalised incredulity at this daring, brazen confession, and the red spots on the cheeks of Chris grew deeper.

"I don't see how any one can be surprised to hear it," she went on defiantly. "How can I pretend that it wasn't pleasanter for me to have a nice man, a handsome, amiable man, who admired me and liked me, to go about with, than to have to moon about half the day by myself, or to have nobody but Lorna's admirers and friends to talk to? I wanted my own admirers and friends, and I don't think anybody can wonder at it."

"Admirers!" echoed Carrie in a shocked tone.

Patricia turned upon her.

"Remember," she said simply, "that I'd always been used to having people to go about with me, and to run about for me, and—well, yes, admirers isn't a pretty word, but it's the right word, I suppose, for Giles did admire me very much."

This was worse and worse. Where was she going to stop?

"Why should anybody be surprised? It was only natural. And it seems to me that it was not only natural, but it was what was expected of me. For," she went on with a sort of triumph in her tone, "if

you, Mr. Thorne, didn't expect me to behave like that, what made you send some one to watch how I did behave?"

This was a point, certainly, and old Christopher's frown showed that he knew she had scored.

She turned to her husband.

"And I can't help thinking," she went on, "that my husband ought to have known what would happen, and that he ought not to have left me all by myself so long, business or no business, father or no father."

She had carried the war into the enemy's camp. Chris moved uneasily.

"I've reproached myself for it lots of times," he said, "but I was doing so well that I got carried on."

"Well, and I got carried on too," retorted Patricia to the consternation of everybody. "And at last when I couldn't get any answers to my letters, I made up my mind to go to Russia myself——"

"To Russia!" cried everybody.

Patricia went on in a louder, firmer voice than before:—

"With one of my brothers, and Giles Wendover."

The effect of this announcement was utterly overwhelming. Her husband stared at her, unable to utter a single word. Mrs. Thorne and Carrie uttered low cries of disgust and despair, while old Mr. Thorne, raising his head and stroking his ragged beard in triumph, looked at his son, as much as to say, "There! What do you want more?"

There ensued a portentous silence.



This was broken by Patricia herself, who laughed, and turning so as to face each person in turn, said, in a tone which was becoming harder and more defiant as she noted the manner in which her confession was received:—

"Where was the harm? Of course I shouldn't have taken Giles with me if there had been anything wrong. I should have thought—I did think—the mere fact that my brother and I chose him to go with us, on account of his knowledge of travelling in Russia, and of his being an old friend, would have been enough to show that there was nothing in all the spiteful talk."

"I can't agree with you," said old Mr. Thorne icily.

"And you?" said Patricia, turning to Chris, "what do you think? What would you have thought? Would you have put the same construction as your father on what I did, if I had come to you in Russia with my brother and Giles, as I meant to do?"

"I shouldn't have liked it, I shouldn't have approved of it at all," said Chris in a stifled voice. "I know there's no harm in what you do, Patricia, but people might certainly suppose there was."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, if you don't trust me, don't believe in me, it doesn't matter. I can go back to Lorna," she said in a very high key, as she dashed across the room to the door. "I suppose I might have known, after the warnings I've had, that you would end by giving way to your father's wish that you should get rid of me, and settle down for life at Barnsfield with some wife of his

and more reckless as she r
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out, if you can, the shocking
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Lorna at Cannes. And I'll g
me over," she ended with
dashed open the door.

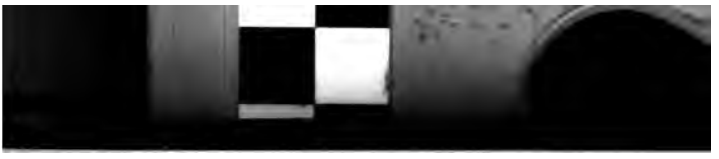
She was stopped by a speech

"You won't have to go far :
know," she cried in acid tone
about here ever since he broug

Patricia stopped and turned

"I suppose you're going to
stay," she said; "but I didn't
ment, that he hadn't gone bac

Carrie laughed derisively.
looking d



Carrie shrugged her shoulders.

"It's the absolute truth," she said. "I don't make any comments on it. He is staying here, and I don't know what he should be staying for, unless it's to be at hand to carry Patricia off, if she feels inclined to go."

"Silence!" said Chris with such a look of passion in his eyes that his sister sank into frightened submission at once. He turned to Patricia. "The rest of the things are bad enough," he said; "I don't mean really wrong, as Carrie pretends, or as my father pretends, but rash, foolish, undesirable. You ought to have been more careful in your conduct, but on the other hand I ought not to have left you alone so long, you, a beautiful and much-admired woman. But it's certain Wendover ought not to have thought himself justified in hanging about up here, and it's exactly the sort of thing that might make people say things they ought not to have the chance of saying."

"But how on earth could I help it? I hadn't the least idea he was staying up here," said Patricia.

Chris looked her full in the eyes, those truthful eyes, the expression of which he could trust. He was puzzled. Myra had gone back to town, he knew; Giles ought to have gone too, long ago. This hanging about in a dull and ugly Yorkshire town, in the most unpleasant season of the year, was suspicious, disagreeable, regrettable.

In the silence that ensued when Patricia had spoken, there was a sound of a very subdued step behind the

young couple. Chris felt a soft hand laid lightly upon his sleeve.

"Chris," said a gentle voice, and turning he saw his sister Millie, very red in the face and downcast in manner, close beside him, "Chris, if you'd let me speak to you presently, I could tell you something."

But she reckoned without the quick-sightedness of Patricia, who looked at her younger sister-in-law for a minute in a puzzled way and then burst into a delighted ripple of laughter.

"I know! Oh, I'm sure I know! Don't I, Millie?" she cried, with a sudden leap forward, as she flung her arms around Millie and kissed her again and again.

Once more the family were to be scandalised, appalled.

For Patricia turned, with her eyes brimming over with fun, to her father-in-law.

"You might have guessed, all of you," she cried, "if you hadn't been so ill-natured and so ready to think the worst that could be thought! Of course, Giles is staying here, not because of me, but because of Millie!"

"Millie!"

The chorus was one of consternation. Millie herself, redder than ever and a little inclined to tearfulness, was hiding her face on her brother's shoulder.

"He isn't wicked, Chris," she whispered. I—I like him very much. And it's quite true—that—that—well, I don't think he's worrying himself much about you or Patricia, though he is careful to ask after you always."

"Always," echoed Carrie sharply from the other end



of the room. "Where have you been meeting this man, this Mr. Wendover?"

Millie turned with a little spirit in her meek eyes.

"Well, of course he didn't dare to come here. What would you all have said if he had? You would have snubbed him, you know you would."

"So you've been meeting him?"

"N—n—not exactly. But I've seen him sometimes, when I was out walking."

Carrie turned in acid triumph to her mother.

"That accounts for her mania for doing the shopping all by herself lately!" she cried to Mrs. Thorne, who could not yet take in the awful fact that the wicked man who had been the villain of the piece in Patricia's case was now to be looked upon as the highly eligible suitor for one of her own daughters.

Chris was laughing softly, and in the meantime looking at his wife with very tender eyes. Since she had been so open in confession, even to her wildest follies, and since the alleged villain was really only the half-accepted lover of his sister, why, there was nothing so very terrible in the story after all.

"Pat," whispered he, as the others drew nearer to Millie, questioning, criticising, "we'll get away to London as soon as we can, and there I can scold you better than I can here. For I see that you're really not to be trusted, and that you've been going on anyhow. I shall never dare to leave you alone again!"

"Well," said Patricia, with a laugh that was on the verge of tears, "you'd better not, I warn you. I've been

very good, really very good, considering all things; but I don't like having to be good, and I'd much rather have a husband always with me so that I needn't have to try."

The confession ought to have shocked Chris, but it did not. He recognised the fact that it was her unlikeness to the girls of his own set which had formed half the attraction Patricia had for him. But it was a shock to him to find that Millie's unlikeness to the girls in *his set* had had the effect of attracting the wayward Giles Wendover in almost the same degree.

It was a little bit of triumph for Patricia when the Thorne family, after all their pious horror of Giles, accepted him, with a satisfaction they could scarcely disguise, as the future husband of Millie.

And when Patricia and Chris, who had insisted upon his father's keeping his promise to set him up in business in London, started together on their first house-hunting expedition, Patricia was careful to remind her husband that she did not intend to be made to live at Hammersmith and call it West Kensington, or in any other part which was cheap because it was nasty.

"I want to live where my friends live, you know, and you won't mind, will you? Because now Millie's going to marry one of them, they'll be your friends too, won't they? And even if you laugh at us for being half-smart, why, it's better, isn't it, to be that than to live right out of the world somewhere, and not to be smart at all?"

Now Christopher, who had learnt something not only

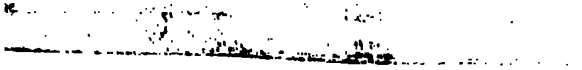


about the appearance and manners but about the morals of the half-smart set, could not quite agree with her. But he was much too shrewd to say so.

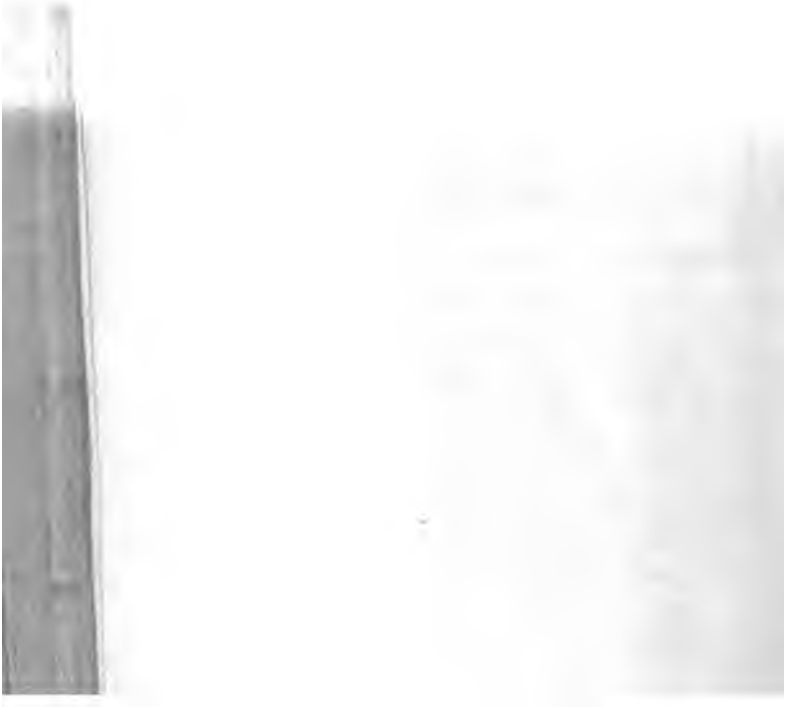
"You shall live where you like, and as you like, my darling," he said.

And he meant it. For he knew that the woman who had been able to withstand what was worst in that particular "set" to which she by birth belonged, would now that she had given her heart to him, suffer herself to be led by him just where he wanted her to go, would keep only that which was best of the half-smart set, and would add to it just that something deeper, truer, purer, sweeter, that the women of the half-smart set missed, and that the men belonging to it failed either to demand or to appreciate.

THE END.



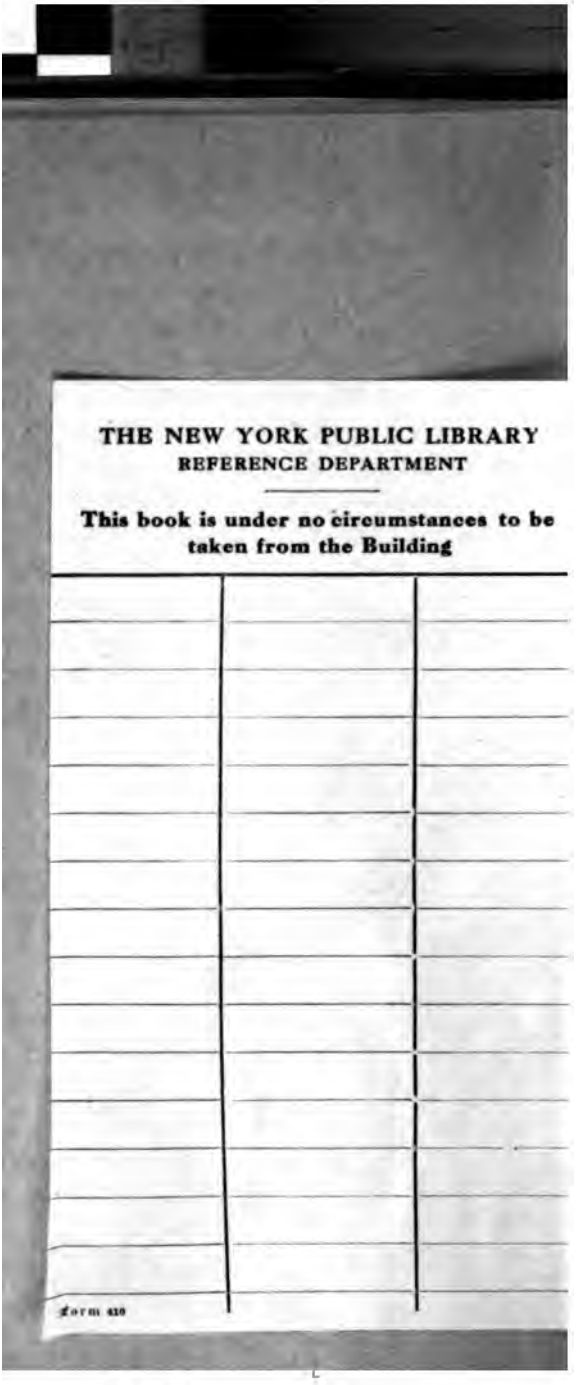






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